

**VIRGINIA TECH NORTHERN VIRGINIA CENTER
COLLEGE OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

Course Syllabus
**WILDLAND FIRE POLICY AND MANAGEMENT
ONLINE COURSE
NR 5984 (CNR XXXXX)
Summer Session I and II, 2009**

Semester information: Class starts the week of May 25, 2009

Course Number/Index: NR 5984; CRN xxxxx

Course Credits: 3 Semester Credits

Course Instructor: Dr. Jennifer Plyler, (Ph.D. Forestry, Virginia Tech, 1997)
Visiting Assistant Professor, College of Natural Resources, Northern
Virginia Center, Virginia Tech

Telephone: (240) 893-5940, call before 8 PM

E-Mail: pls98@verizon.net

Appointments: I am available for in person (for students residing in the DC metro area) or phone appointments. Leave a phone message or send me an e-mail.

Inclement Weather Hotline: In the case of inclement weather, please call the weather hotline at (703) 538- 8325. They will post the status of classes on this recorded message.

Course Description: This course will give you an in-depth understanding of wildland fire policy and management and how fire has influenced our natural resource political landscape as well as our current ecological systems. Students will learn about the evolution of wildland fire policy as it relates to changes in fire management and how wildland fire has impacted human communities, natural ecosystems, and many of our natural resource policies and challenges today. Additionally, fire management policy will be discussed in the context of other land management policies such as the Weeks Act, National Forest Management Act (NFMA), and the Wilderness Act.

The instructor uses online and conference call discussions, technical and peer reviewed journal articles, group projects, and field assignments to convey wildland fire policy information as well as information on the ecological effects of fire on plants, animals, soil, water and air. Our discussions about fire policy will address federal fire policy as well as state and local policies and how these policies actually influence and dictate land management approaches (i.e., even and uneven aged management, thinning) as well as the management of large scale fires, which may include full-scale fire suppression, allowing a fire to burn to meet clearly stated land management objectives, wildland fire use fires, and burn out operations or a combination of any of the above.

Course Prerequisites: Baccalaureate degree and professional experience.

Course Objectives: Having successfully completed, the student will:

- Describe the ecological, cultural, political, and social significance of fire
- Explain how fire policy has evolved over time at both the federal and state level
- Apply current and past fire policies to fire management strategies
- Recognize the relationship between fire policy and other land management policies
- Critically evaluate and demonstrate the success (or failure) of federal fire policy in achieving both land management and federal agency objectives
- Write a federal wildland fire policy that improves upon existing policies

Grades: I use the following grading scale when computing final grades:

A+ 97-100	B+ 87-89	C+ 77-79	D 69-60
A 94-96	B 84-86	C 74-76	Below 59-Failing
A- 90-93	B- 80-83	C- 70-73	

Readings: The required books for this course are available on-line at amazon.com or other on-line bookstores. The instructor will post on blackboard, as pdf files, a compilation of articles from scientific and professional journals, excerpts from books and newspaper clippings, and other source materials.

Required Readings:

Pyne Stephen. 2001. *Fire: A brief history*. Seattle & London: University of Washington Press. p. 204.

Pyne Stephen. 1982. *Fire in America: A cultural history of wildland and rural fire*. Seattle & London: University of Washington Press. p. 654.

Wuerthner, George, edited by. 2006. *The wildland fire reader*. Washington: Island Press. pp. 429.

Grades:

*****ALL PAPERS ARE DUE BY 5 PM AND VIA DROPBOX ON BLACKBOARD UNLESS OTHERWISE SPECIFIED OR AN ALTERNATE TIME AND DATE ARE PREARRANGED WITH THE INSTRUCTOR*****

I will convene three conference calls per the two summer sessions to check in with students. I expect your full participation in these calls since the calls count toward your participation grade. If you have a scheduling conflict, you must inform me prior to the call. Anyone who misses the call(s) is responsible for getting the notes or information discussed on the call.

All calls are at 6:00 pm eastern time and usually last 30-60 minutes. The call in number is 1-800-704-9804, passcode: 185622. I have scheduled conference calls on the following dates:

Tuesday June 2, 6:00 pm

Tuesday June 22, 6:00 pm

Tuesday July 20, 6:00 pm

Online participation and discussion (20 percent) Students are expected to contribute to the learning environment by participating in online discussions and weekly study questions. Students will also play an active role in learning and teaching classmates by sharing their professional

work experiences online. The online class replaces attending a class in person. The amount of time spent in class is 2 hours and 45 minutes weekly. I expect roughly the same amount of time spent interacting online on the discussion board. This time does not include time spent preparing for class, writing assignments or completing the readings.

Fire policy paper (30 percent) Each student will develop a **NEW federal fire policy** that addresses the current political, economic, cultural, social, and ecological landscape. Use your imagination. Some, but not all of the issues that need to be addressed in your paper are federal fire budgets, role of local and state fire jurisdictions, wildland/urban interface, past fire policies, other land management policies, changing technology, science/research on the role of fire in our landscape, ecological conditions, climate change, drought, and values of the American public.

The final paper should be no longer than 7 double spaced pages (12 point font and one inch margins). **PROPER CITATIONS ARE REQUIRED!!** I will not grade any paper that does not have references in the text and a list of citations at the end of the paper.

Here is the schedule for final papers:

¹Outline: July 13

Feedback on outline: July 20

First draft (optional-see footnote) of fire policy paper due: July 27

Feedback on first draft: August 3

Final (mandatory if you did not hand in first draft or if you want to improve your grade-see footnote) paper due: August 10

Fire Policy Analysis Papers (20 percent) Students will write two, two-page (no more than two pages. I stop reading at two pages. NO JOKE) double-spaced (12 point font and one inch margins) thoughtful analysis of a current wildland fire **policy** issue. There will be plenty of opportunities and fire-related issues to choose from given the dire predictions for the upcoming fire season.

PROPER CITATIONS ARE REQUIRED!! I will not grade any paper that does not have references in the text and a list of citations at the end of the paper.

The papers and articles are due via dropbox on blackboard by 5 pm on June 8 and June 29.

Applied Fire Policy Group Project (30 percent) I will assign students to groups. Each group will select a current fire on the National Interagency Situation Report (<http://www.nifc.gov/nicc/sitreprt.pdf>) to evaluate the policy implications of that fire. The fires will range from suppression fires to wildland fire use fires, to jointly managed fires.

Evaluations include but are not limited to a concise definition of the fire policy as it relates to the incident of your group's choice, fire team management objectives, social issues, political context, ecological conditions, budget implications, management strategies, and other related issues. You

¹ I will provide feedback on fire policy course paper. What this means is that you send me your first draft (if you elect to do a first draft) and I will provide you feedback. You incorporate that feedback and resubmit the paper for a final grade. If you elect to take the grade assigned on your first draft and not turn in a final, it is okay. You can also elect to turn in a final paper and take that grade as final. The latter option **DOES NOT** allow you to incorporate my feedback and resubmit the paper for hopefully a better grade. I do require an outline for the midterm regardless of whether you submit your first draft or final midterm or both.

will be graded not only on your presentation on BB but also your engagement with other groups and how your group responds (timeliness and substance) to others' questions.

Groups will post their papers, powerpoints, videos, interview transcripts, pictures, etc. on BB on Monday, August 3. These evaluations will serve as the discussion topic for that week. Teams can use multimedia to present their evaluations. Be creative.

Assignment timeline:

Assign groups: Conference call on Tuesday, June 22, 6 pm

Applied Fire Policy Incident Selected: due to the instructor July 13, 5 pm

Groups assign readings: Monday, July 27, 5 pm

Groups post their presentations online: Monday, August 3, 5 pm

Discussion and feedback from everyone: Week of August 3(entire week)

EXTRA CREDIT

Complete a third analysis paper any time prior to July 20 and you will receive two points on your final cumulative grade. Same format and requirements apply (see above).

COURSE EVALUATIONS

In the spirit of continuous improvement, the instructor seeks ways to improve this course and values your input. **To that end, you will be asked to complete a mid-term and final instructor evaluation during the weeks of July 6 and August 10**, respectively in addition to the formal evaluation provided by the college. At any point during the course, the instructor welcomes your suggestions and comments.

Suggested format for Citations:

http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

Class Schedule

Date, Lesson Topic, and Required and Supplemental Readings

Week of May 25: Introduction: Fire Ecology and the Importance of Fire

Required Reading: Pyne, 2001 pp XV-85

Weeks of June 1: Fire Ecology: Pre Columbian, Pre settlement (paleo-Indians)

Required Readings:

Fire Management Today

http://www.nps.gov/fire/utility/related_items/1825_aug19.pdf

Timeline: Wildland Fire Operations

http://www.nps.gov/fire/utility/uti_tl_operationstext.cfm

Historical Wildland Fire Statistics

<http://www.nifc.gov/stats/historicalstats.html>

Statistics on 33 U.S. wildfires from 1825 to 2000, from the National Interagency Fire Center.

Conference call on Tuesday, June 2 at 6 pm

Week of June 8: Fire Ecology: Post Columbian, Post Settlement (Native Americans and others). Current ecological conditions and fire behavior

Required Readings:

Fire Management Today

http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/fmt/fmt_pdfs/fmn60-4.pdf

How Plants Use Fire, Stephen Pyne

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/fire/plants.html>

"The World on Fire"

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/fire/world.html#nort>

Overview of global fire issues summarized for the layman; on NOVA/PBS site "Fire Wars."

Wildfire ecology in the western United States, part 1 and 2

<http://www.cyberwest.com/cw17/fire1.html>

First Fire Policy Analysis Paper Due on BB June 8 by 5 pm

Week of June 15: Federal wildland fire policy, pre 1900

Required Readings:

Fire Wars video (transcript at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/transcripts/2908_fire.html)

Week of June 22: Federal wildland fire policy, post 1900-1950

Required Readings:

Restoring Fire to High Elevation Forests in California

This "**let-burn**" program conforms to the present Park Service **policy** of restoring and maintaining natural environmental conditions in the Parks. From the 1920's until 1968, the Park www.nps.gov/.../pdf/kilgore_briggs_high-elev-fire_j-for-1972.pdf

Conference call on Tuesday, June 22 at 6 pm to assign groups for applied fire policy project

Week of June 29: Federal and state wildland fire policy, 1950-current

Required Readings:

Incident Command System

([http://www.nrt.org/Production/NRT/NRTWeb.nsf/AllAttachmentsByTitle/SA-52ICSUCTA/\\$File/ICSUCTA.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.nrt.org/Production/NRT/NRTWeb.nsf/AllAttachmentsByTitle/SA-52ICSUCTA/$File/ICSUCTA.pdf?OpenElement))

Clean Air Act (1955)

Wilderness Act (1964) (http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/anps/anps_6b.htm,

<http://www.fws.gov/laws/lawsdigest/wildrns.html>,

<http://walter.arizona.edu/society/policy/wa/wa2.asp>)

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (1970)
(<http://www.epa.gov/Compliance/nepa/index.html>)

Second Fire Policy Analysis Paper Due on BB June 29 by 5 pm

Week of July 6: (continued) Federal and state wildland fire policy, 1950-current

Required Readings:

Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (1985 and 2001) (http://www.nifc.gov/fire_policy/,
http://www.nifc.gov/fire_policy/history/index.htm,
http://www.nifc.gov/fire_policy/mission/1995_fed_wildland_fire_policy_program_report.pdf,
and http://www.nifc.gov/fire_policy/mission/2008_mod_impl_fed_fire_policy.pdf)

National Fire Plan (<http://www.forestsandrangelands.gov/NFP/index.shtml> and
<http://www.forestsandrangelands.gov/reports/documents/2001/8-20-en.pdf>)

Instructor's mid-term evaluation due on BB by 5 pm July 6

Week of July 13: (continued) Federal and state wildland fire policy, 1950-current

Required Readings:

Healthy Forest Initiative (http://www.forestsandrangelands.gov/Healthy_Forests/index.shtml)
Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003 (http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=108_cong_bills&docid=f:h1904enr.txt.pdf)
Appropriate Management Response (AMR)
Proposed Federal Land Assistance, Management and Enhancement Act (FLAME Act)
Proposed Emergency Wildland Fire Response Act of 2008

Outline for course paper due on July 13, 5 pm posted on BB

Week of July 20: East Rock Ridge Fire, a case study (prelude to the group assignment)

Required Readings:

http://www.wildfirelessons.net/documents/East_Slide_Rock_Ridge_Review.pdf

The largest fire in the Intermountain Region for the Forest Service in 2008 started as a wildland fire use event located on the Jarbidge Ranger District of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest in Nevada. After 10 days the fire exceeded the MMA boundary and was turned over to a Type I IMT. Ultimately, the fire was contained at approximately 54,500 acres. The fire left Forest Service lands to burn over 2,000 acres of BLM and 1,661 acres of private property.

In the interest of learning and improving, a review team was asked to visit the district and speak to line officers, fire managers, planners and community members to better understand what happened and look for opportunities to improve our approach to unplanned ignitions.

Feedback on outline July 20
Extra credit paper due July 20

Week of July 27: Wrap up

Required Readings: N/A

**First draft of course paper due on July 27, 5 pm posted on BB
Groups assign readings for August 3 presentations**

Week of August 3: Presentations of Group Projects

Required Readings: TBD by groups

Feedback on first draft of course paper July 27

Week of August 10: Final questions

Required Readings: N/A

**Final draft of course paper due on August 10, 5 pm posted on BB
Instructor's final evaluation due on August 10, 5 pm posted on BB**

GRADUATE HONOR CODE

The tenets of the Virginia Tech Graduate Honor Code will be strictly enforced in this course, and all assignments shall be subject to the stipulations of the Graduate Honor Code as outlined in the 2001-2003 Graduate Catalog. For more information on the Graduate Honor Code, please refer to the GHS Constitution, located online at <http://fbox.vt.edu/studentinfo/gradhonor/>. Please contact the instructor immediately if you have questions.

POLICY ON PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC HONESTY

The Virginia Tech Honor System is in effect for this course. Please take the time to read this document and make sure that you understand your responsibilities as a student. The Graduate Honor System can be accessed online at <http://filebox.vt.edu/studentinfo/gradhonor/>. The Undergraduate Honor System can be accessed online at <http://www.honorsystem.vt.edu/>. The following statement, taken from the Graduate Honor System, describes the types of violations covered under the Honor System:

All forms of academic work performed by any graduate student enrolled on a part-time or full-time basis under any of the admission categories shall be subject to the stipulations of the Graduate Honor Code. Such work includes, but is not limited to, course work, labwork, thesis or dissertation work, research, teaching, and extension. Violations of the Graduate Honor Code are categorized as follows: *Cheating, Plagiarism, Falsification, and Academic Sabotage* Cheating is defined as the giving or receiving of any unauthorized aid, assistance, or unfair advantage in any form of academic work Plagiarism is a specific form of cheating, and is defined as the copying of the language, structure, idea, and/or thoughts of another and claiming or attempting to imply that it is one's own original work Students who falsify, orally, in writing, or via electronic media, any circumstance relevant to their academic work shall be guilty of a violation of this Code Academic sabotage is purposeful vandalism directed against any academic endeavor or equipment (from the Virginia Tech Graduate Honor System, accessible online at: <http://filebox.vt.edu/studentinfo/gradhonor/>).

Be advised that plagiarism or other forms of violations of the Virginia Tech Honor System will not be tolerated.

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

Students with special needs or circumstances are encouraged to meet with the instructor after the first class or ASAP. Please do not wait till later in the semester. In all cases, please feel free to contact the instructor should you have any questions.

NOTE: The course syllabus is a work in progress. Changes and updates will be made to accommodate the needs and interests of the students. Modifications may also be made if natural resource communications issues surface during the semester that may provide a unique learning experience for students.