This course offers an introduction, at the graduate level, to the various theoretical approaches and primary sources used to study the history of the interaction of humans with the natural environment of North America since European settlement. We will explore four interrelated themes over time, examining how Americans: 1) interacted with natural processes (such as floods, drought, fire, disease, insects); 2) used natural resources (such as soil, water, timber, minerals); 3) made public policy (parks and conservation, city planning, antipollution laws); 4) thought about “nature” (changing ideas as reflected in art, religion, literature, science). Our fundamental premise is that how Americans have acted to shape their environment over the past four centuries has been a consequence of their ideas and perceptions of it.

Course Requirements: You will be expected to participate actively in class discussions of the common readings. In addition, you will be expected to lead two class discussions over the course of the semester, doing the extra reading necessary to place the week’s reading into historiographical context for your classmates. A brief (8-10 pg) paper is due one week after each of your oral presentations. You will also be expected to write a longer (10-15 pg) final paper on a topic of your choice. This may be either a review essay on some aspect of the field that you want to explore further, or a prospectus for an original research paper to be completed during the summer.

Books: available for purchase at Amherst Books, 8 Main Street, Amherst, MA:

- W. Cronon, ed. Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature
- T. Steinberg, Down to Earth: Nature’s Role in American History
- R. Sellars, Preserving Nature in the National Parks
- D. Worster, Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s
- A. Leopold, A Sand County Almanac
- G. Markowitz & D. Rosner, Deceit and Denial: The Deadly Politics of Industrial Pollution
- D. Davis, When Smoke Ran Like Water: Tales of Environmental Deception and the Battle Against Pollution

Most of the required readings are on electronic reserve. The password for the course is “nature.” In addition, the library also has a complete run of the journal Environmental History and its predecessor, Environmental History Review, an excellent source of articles and review essays on various topics. Finally, I have an environmental history website that contains a number of useful links; its current address is http://www-unix.oit.umass.edu/~hist383.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

2/3 Introduction: Defining the Field


History 691/791E: American Environmental History

2/10: Native American vs. European Landscapes


J. Merrell, *The Indians’ New World*, ch 1
R. Gutierrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away*, ch. 1
T. Silver, *A New Face on the Countryside: Indians, Colonists, and Slaves in South Atlantic Forests, 1500-1800*

2/17 Subsistence vs. the Marketplace


C. Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions*, pp. 149-270
S. Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*
J. Stilgoe, *Common Landscape of America, 1580-1845*

2/24 Industrialization as Environmental Revolution

T. Steinberg, *Nature Incorporated: Industrialization and the Waters of New England*
J. Cumbler, *Reasonable Use*

3/2 Picturing Nature


A. Miller, *Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825-75*
B. Novack, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape Painting, 1825-75*
J. Wilmerding, ed. *American Light: The Luminist Movement, 1850-75*

3/9 The West


W. Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*

D. Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West*


J. Sears, *Sacred Places*, ch. 6-7


P. Hales, *William Henry Jackson and the Transformation of the American Landscape*

W. Goetzmann, *The West of the Imagination*


3/16 No class (Spring Break)

3/23 National Parks

R. Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks*


J. Sears, *Sacred Places*, ch. 6-7


3/30 Conservation


D. Lowenthal, *George Perkins Marsh*


S. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency*

S. Schrepfer, *The Fight to Save the Redwoods*
City Parks and Suburbs

J. Sears, Sacred Places, ch. 5.

D. Schuyler, The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth Century America (1986)
R. Rosenzweig & E. Blackmar, The Park & The People: A History of Central Park

Regional Planning

D. Worster, Dust Bowl

B. MacKaye, The New Exploration: A Philosophy of Regional Planning (1928)
P. Cutler, The Public Landscape of the New Deal
R. Dorman, Revolt of the Provinces: The Regionalist Movement in America 1920-45

Inventing Ecology

A. Leopold, A Sand County Almanac

(Reprinted in Merchant, Major Problems, pp. 465-79).

Post World War II Landscape

J. Kunstler, The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America’s Man-Made Landscape

K. Jackson, The Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the U.S., ch. 10-14
M. Sorkin, ed. Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space
Modern Environmentalism and Environmental Justice

G. Markowitz & D. Rosner, *Deceit and Denial: The Deadly Politics of Industrial Pollution* OR
D. Davis, *When Smoke Ran Like Water: Tales of Environmental Deception and the Battle Against Poll*

A. Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-80*
R. Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement*
C. Sellers, *Hazards of the Job: From Industrial Disease to Environmental Health Science* (1997)
R. Paehlke, *Environmentalism and the Future of Progressive Politics*

Discussion of final papers

Final Papers Due
Third Paper, due Tues 5/18, with topic identified by Tuesday 4/6 and short oral presentation in class on Wednesday 5/11:

There are two options:

1) Write a third review essay on some aspect of environmental history that you want to explore further. This is similar in format and length (approximately 10 pages) to your first two papers. You may choose to review a book about a contemporary environmental issue and place it in historical perspective, or examine a past ice and historians different interpretations of it. To stimulate some ideas, here is a list of books on contemporary environmental issues (in addition to the ones on the course syllabus).

- Theo Colborn, Our Stolen Future: How We Are Threatening Our Fertility, Intelligence, & Survival (1996)
- Robert Bullard, Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality (1990)
- Al Gore, Earth in the Balance (1992)
- Gregg Easterbrook, A Moment on Earth: Coming Age of Environmental Optimism (1995)
- Rachel Carson, Silent Spring (1962)
- Paul Ehrlich, The Population Bomb (1968)
- Paul Ehrlich, Cassandra Conference (1988)
- Barry Commoner, Making Peace with the Planet (1990)
- Lester Brown, ed. State of the World (any year)
- Amory Lovins, Soft Energy Paths (1977)
- Michael Brown, Laying Waste: Poisoning of America by Toxic Chemicals (1979)
- Laurie Mott & Karen Snyder, Pesticide Alert (1987)

2) Prepare a prospectus for an original research paper to be completed during Spring semester.

(see other side for guidelines on preparing a research paper prospectus)
Preparing a research paper prospectus

Writing a research paper is an ambitious goal. You can achieve it by working steadily, breaking the large job down into its component parts. Rather than doing all of your research first, then writing, you can literally build your paper up, section by section. A good prospectus can form as much as the first third of your paper and help you to outline the rest. So please take this assignment seriously.

Typically, the prospectus consists of four parts:

1) An initial statement of the historical question that you want to explore. Arrange this discussion from the general to the more specific. For example, you may be interested in environmental changes that accompanied the development of the automobile in the 1920s. One way to explore this large question is by focusing on a particular place, such as Springfield. As you discover what primary sources are available, you may be able to narrow your question even further; for example, if you discover the scrapbooks of an African-American motoring club in Springfield are at the Connecticut Valley Historical Museum, you might decide to write about the impact of the automobile on African-American families.

2) A discussion of what you have read about the question thusfar, based on secondary works. For example, you would discuss other studies of the environmental impact of the automobile; as you read more secondary works, this section will expand.

3) A discussion of what primary sources you will examine to explore the question. Mention where these sources are located, how extensive they are, and how specifically you expect that they will help you to answer the question.

4) A bibliography listing what you have already read and what you plan to examine in the future. As you do more research this section will expand, so that by the end of the semester your final bibliography will already be done.

I anticipate that all four parts of your prospectus will be approximately 15 pages, though you may make your prospectus as long as you want. Keep in mind that you will be presenting a preliminary version of this to the rest of the class, so the more you can show early on, the more we can help you.