History 473
American Environmental History to 1890

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office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 3:45-5 p.m., or by appointment
Lecture and discussion schedule: Monday/Wednesday 2-3:20 p.m., 185 Lillis

Introduction
This course examines American environmental history from just before a sustained European presence to about 1890, which marks the beginning of the environmental regulatory era. Environmental history explores the past through an interdisciplinary approach that integrates insights from ecology, geography, anthropology, literature, art history, the history of science and technology, and landscape architecture. At its essence, environmental history considers how humans and their natural environments have interacted and reshaped each other through time. Those interactions undergird all of American history. To demonstrate that claim, we’ll follow several paths of inquiry: How has the natural environment influenced human actions, decisions, and cultural and social development? How have people perceived or imagined the natural world? How have they reshaped and even reordered the natural environment? How have they struggled with each other over ways the environment should be treated and understood? What have been the intended and unintended consequences of their actions? What are the ethical implications of those actions? We’ll also pay attention to the marks people leave on the physical landscape, and we’ll consider how we might learn more about human history by using those marks as clues. To help us understand those clues, we will take a field trip at the end of the fourth week of the course.

This course counts as a core humanities course for majors in Environmental Studies and Environmental Science due to its focus on environmental change through a historical perspective.

“I know you miss the Wainwrights, Bobby, but they were weak and stupid people — and that’s why we have wolves and other large predators.”

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Learning Outcomes:
By the end of the term, you should be able to:
● Trace the history of changes to the American environment through the 19th century, over time
● Analyze and interpret “primary” sources of historical information
● Identify and critically assess an author’s argument or thesis
● Write an essay and develop your own argument, supported by evidence

Course Requirements
In addition to participating in class, this course involves extensive reading and writing, plus a half-day field trip and a final exam, as detailed below.

Readings
History is a literary field, and thus this course is reading-intensive. Historians, however, do not read books to commit data or formulas to memory, as scientists might. They look for arguments, persuasive evidence, and cogent analysis. A guide for critically reading history is posted on Canvas. Reading assignments are listed at the end of each week but are due on the date of the writing assignment or on the date of the related lecture. Anticipate reading 95 pages per week, though the actual number of pages may be more or less in a particular week. (Be sure to look ahead; you must read the books in their entirety by weeks 3, 5, and 8.)

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<tr>
<th>Books (available at the Duck Store)</th>
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<th>Articles (available on Canvas)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Grady Clay, “Strips” and “Sinks,” from <em>Close-Up: How to Read the American City</em> (1973)</td>
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<td>May Theilgaard Watts, “Watching the Islands Go By,” in <em>Reading the Landscape of America</em> (1957)</td>
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<td>Travis Williams, excerpt from <em>The Willamette River Field Guide</em> (2009)</td>
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<th>Primary sources (available on Canvas)</th>
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<td>“The Raven” (Athapascan) and “Turkey Makes the Corn and Coyote Plants It” (White Mountain Apache), in <em>American Indian Myths and Legends</em>, ed. by Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz (1985)</td>
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<tr>
<td>George Catlin, “Extinction of the Mandans,” from <em>Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians</em> (1844)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Henry David Thoreau, excerpts from <em>Walden; or, Life in the Woods</em> (1854)</td>
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**Field Trip (25 pts.)**

On Friday, October 30, or Saturday, October 31, (your choice, via sign-up sheet) we will go on a half-day field trip to explore Eugene’s Willamette River. We will learn to read the landscape and understand how Eugene’s environment has changed over time. To prepare for this field trip, you will complete a set of readings beforehand. Participation in the field trip is mandatory and cannot be made up. Please make whatever arrangements necessary to ensure your participation.

**Participation (25 pts.)**

Your participation grade will be based on your attendance and active participation in class discussions. I have four ground rules for discussion: (1) Come prepared for discussions by critically reading all the assigned materials, and always bring the books we read to class. (2) You must participate in our conversations with thoughtful discussion. (3) Don’t try to lead the conversation astray in an effort to cover your lack of preparedness. (4) Show respect for your classmates’ ideas, even—or especially—when they’re different from your own.

**Attendance is required.** After the first two absences (including absences for illnesses, doctor’s appointment, religious holidays, etc.), each absence will result in a loss of 5 points. **More than four absences may result in an F in the course.** Exceptions will be made only in the event of a documented university-sponsored activity or a protracted illness, at my discretion. Please note: if you have the flu or another contagious illness, we would all appreciate it if you would stay home. Email me and count those days among your two “excused” absences. I do not want documentation of your absences, except in the following instances: (1) you need to submit a late assignment or take a make-up exam; (2) you participated in a university-sponsored activity; (3) you’ve had a prolonged absence due to a contagious or protracted illness or another calamity that you can document. Leaving early or arriving after the lecture has begun may count as an absence. I keep attendance by beginning class with a question from the readings or lectures, which you answer on an index cards. These questions will help you prepare for the objective section of the final exam. Please come prepared by purchasing a pack of 3 x 5 index cards.

**Journals (25 pts. each, for a total of 50 pts.)**

For the readings on “Kennecott Journey: The Paths Out of Town” (Week 1) and excerpts from *Walden* (Week 6), you will write a reflection journal entry of perhaps 350 words on Canvas. Your entry must be posted before the class discussion on the given reading, as the assignment portal will “close” at 10 a.m. (Students who enroll after Week 1 may post that week’s journal entry at a later date, by special arrangement with me.) For each set of readings, select one interesting aspect and record your reflections, thoughts, and insights. The journals do not need to be formal essays, though they should be structured by your own argument; beyond that, they need to show thoughtful reflection on relevant themes. They should be neither rants nor reviews. Do not gush. In assessing journals, I look for the following:

- Reading comprehension
- Uses evidence to support points
- Thoughtful reflection
- Evidence of critical and/or creative thinking
- Evidence of synthesis, analysis, and evaluation
Short Analytical Papers (50 pts. each, for a total of 150 pts.)

For each of the three books, you will write an analytical paper of 750-1000 words. Analyze a theme or issue in the book that you think is important, interesting, provocative, or surprising. The point is to think deeply about one of the issues that the author raises, or perhaps the book’s argument or “big idea,” and analyze it. Tip: I am not looking for a “book report,” a synopsis of the book, or a discussion of whether or not you liked the book. I want analysis. Please consult Canvas for “Tips for Writing Essays,” which also contains a grading rubric.

Term paper (100 pts.)

For the term paper, you will select a published primary source (such as nature writing, a journal, or a report) written by an American naturalist, botanist, or explorer in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. I will provide a list for you to choose from. You will read and analyze this source, using questions that I provide as guidance. You will then write a paper of 1,800-2,500 words (7-9 pages), plus bibliography, that makes an argument about the person’s ideas about nature, places those ideas within a broader historical context, offers a brief biographical sketch, and engages at least three passages of the document in a close textual analysis. You may find background information and guidance in my lectures and in the following books, all on reserve in Knight Library: Richard Judd, The Untilled Garden; Donald Worster, Nature’s Economy; Daniel Peterson, ed., Early American Nature Writers; Kathleen A. Brosnan, ed., The Encyclopedia of American Environmental History; and Douglas Cazaux Sackman, A Companion to American Environmental History. I will provide more detail about how to do this assignment in class and on Canvas. You must select your source by Monday, Oct. 19, 5 p.m. Your paper is due by 5 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 4. Note: Late final projects will be graded down 5 points for each day it is late, including weekends. I will accept no papers after the final exam.

A rubric for the term project is posted on Canvas. In brief, your essay will be judged on the basis of your choice of source material, the quality of your argument and evidence, the context you develop for the subject, your explication of at least three passages from your primary source, and the quality of the writing. (See for instructions for formatting papers and citations below.)

FORMATTING PAPERS AND CITATIONS

All papers should be double-spaced with one-inch margins and a Times New Roman 12-point font. Indent the beginning of each paragraph by 5 spaces. Do not add a space between paragraphs. (Microsoft’s default format is 1.5 spaces with an extra space between paragraphs, so you need to reset those defaults.) All papers should be saved in Word and uploaded through SafeAssign.

If you’re identifying a quotation within an assigned reading that is the sole focus of the assignment (as with the short papers), you should simply cite the page number in parentheses at the end of the sentence. In all other instances (such as the term paper), please use the Chicago Manual of Style citation method (see Canvas).

Final Exam (100 pts.)

The final exam will have two sections: a matching-identification section and an essay section. In the matching section, you will match a name, place, or term to the best statement identifying it.
In the essay section, you will write extended answers to two questions. You will have a choice of questions to answer, and you must write a coherent essay on each, drawing on the lectures and readings for the class. Each essay will be graded on the basis of the argument you make, the evidence you use to support your argument, your demonstrated understanding of the information and historical interpretations provided both in class and in the readings, and the overall coherence of the essay. We will discuss the exam format in more detail during an in-class review session. To help you focus your studying, I will give you a long list of possible questions and a list of names/places/terms from which the actual exam questions will be chosen.

**Grading**

Below are the course requirements and their value in determining your final grade. Failure to undertake any component of the course may result in failure of the entire course. Note that class attendance is required.

- Short Analytical Papers on the Books: 150 pts.
- Term Project: 100 pts.
- Final Exam: 100 pts.
- Journals: 50 pts.
- Class Participation: 25 pts.
- Field Trip: 25 pts.

**TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS**: 450 pts.

**Grading Scale**:

- 441-450 = A+
- 423-440 = A
- 405-422 = A-
- 396-404 = B+
- 378-395 = B
- 360-377 = B-
- 351-359 = C+
- 333-350 = C
- 315-332 = C-
- 270-314 = D
- <270 = F

**My grading standards follow those adopted by the history department.** For more specific guidelines on how I grade essays and the term project, please consult the rubrics posted on Canvas.

- A+: Work of unusual distinction. This grade is rarely awarded.
- A: Work that distinguishes itself by the excellence of its grasp of the material and the precision and insight of its argument, in addition to being well executed and reasonably free of errors.
- B: Work that satisfies the main criteria of the assignment and demonstrates command of the material, but does not achieve the level of excellence that characterizes work of A quality.
- C: Work that demonstrates a rudimentary grasp of the material and satisfies at least some of the assigned criteria reasonably well.
- D: Work that demonstrates a poor grasp of the material.
- F: Work that is weak in every aspect, demonstrating a basic misunderstanding of the material and/or disregard for the assignment, or it is plagiarized.

For the department’s official standards, see: [http://history.uoregon.edu/undergraduate/index.php](http://history.uoregon.edu/undergraduate/index.php).

**Classroom Policies**

Please turn off all electronic devices (including computers, except for a documented disability) while in class. Ringing cell phones are my pet peeve. Please do not text-message in class. Please do not leave the room to take a call or respond to a message. All of these actions disturb your
Marsha Weisiger/Environmental History Syllabus/6

classmates and me. Repeated failure to turn off your electronic devices may result in dismissal from the classroom. I respectfully request that you arrive on time and stay until the end of class. I do not accept graded course work after the class period for which the assignment is due, and a missed deadline will result in a 0 on the assignment. It is your responsibility to read the syllabus and know the due dates. I will always accept an assignment early, if you anticipate an absence. I do not accept emailed assignments; please plan ahead so that you successfully print your work before class. “Make up” exams and late essays will be accepted only for a documented excused absence due to illness; a documented severe illness or death in your family; an unanticipated calamity; or a documented school-sponsored activity in which you are officially representing UO. If you anticipate an absence, you may submit an electronic copy before the assignment is due; if you need to submit “make up” work, please make arrangements with me to submit your work as soon as possible.

I take plagiarism very seriously. All work that you turn in must be your own. Any work submitted for credit that includes the words or ideas of anyone else must fully and accurately identify your source with a citation. Note that replacing words with synonyms, changing verb tense, stringing together phrases from a source, or other minor alterations does not qualify as paraphrasing. Even with a citation, failure to put quotation marks around direct quotations constitutes plagiarism, because it implies that the writing is your own. (By the way, submitting the same paper to more than one class for credit is also academic misconduct.) In the event of an act of plagiarism, I will impose sanctions, as provided in the Student Code of Conduct. **The minimum sanction will be an F on the assignment, but plagiarism can also merit an F in the course, even for a first offense.** See [http://studentlife.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/StudentConductCode/tabid/69/Default.aspx#Academic_Misconduct](http://studentlife.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/StudentConductCode/tabid/69/Default.aspx#Academic_Misconduct). If you are confused about this or do not understand the consequences of academic dishonesty at the UO—or the ethical issues behind these university policies—please read these guidelines: [http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/](http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/)

Accommodations: If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please arrange to see me soon. I also encourage you to contact the Accessible Education Center (formerly Disability Services) in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoaec@uoregon.edu for assistance with accommodations.

Canvas

Please refer frequently to the course site on Canvas for announcements, reminders, and the following materials:

- Readings (other than the three required books)
- Book guides
- Note sheets (posted after lectures)
- Slides and videos (posted after lectures)
- Portals for submitting assignments
- Term paper guidelines (including project sign-up sheet, how to analyze primary sources, Chicago Manual of Style citation guide, and a link to the citation machine”)
- Field trip instructions
- Tips for critically reading history
- Tips for writing essays
- Tips for taking an essay exam
- Tips for avoiding plagiarism
- Examples of “A” essays
- Rubrics for grading essays and exams
SCHEDULE OF LECTURES AND READINGS

Adjustments to the lecture schedule may occur at my discretion and will be announced in class.

Week 1: Beginnings
M • (Sept. 28): In the Beginning
W • (Sept. 30): World of Native America
Journals due on Canvas by 1 p.m.

READING ASSIGNMENT (27 pp.):
- William Cronon, “Kencocott Journey: The Paths Out of Town” (C)
- “The Raven” (Athapascan) and “Turkey Makes the Corn and Coyote Plants It” (White Mountain Apache) (C)

Week 2: Ecological Imperialism
M • (Oct. 5): Co-Invasions and the Columbian Exchange
W • (Oct. 7): Commodities of the Deep

READING ASSIGNMENT (25 pp.):
- George Catlin, “Extinction of the Mandans” (C)
- Nancy Shoemaker, “Mr. Tashtego: Native American Whalemens in Antebellum New England.” (C)
- Nancy Shoemaker, “Whale Meat in American History.” (optional) (C)

Week 3: Marking the Land
M • (Oct. 12): Jefferson’s America
W • (Oct. 14): Discussion of Vicious/Term project

Essay on Vicious due at 1 p.m.

READING ASSIGNMENT:
- Coleman, Vicious (entire—236 pp.)

Week 4: Commodifying Land and People
M • (Oct. 19): Owning Nature

Selection of final project sources due on sign-up sheet by 5 p.m.
W • (Oct. 21): Landscapes of Domination and Resistance

READING ASSIGNMENT in preparation for field trip next week (50 pp.):
- University of Wisconsin, How to Read a Landscape (Skim the headlines and read whatever intrigues you): http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/landscapes.htm
- Grady Clay, “Strips” and “Sinks” (B)
- D.W. Meinig, “The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene” (B)
- May Theilgaard Watts, “Watching the Islands Go By” (B)
- Travis Williams, excerpt from The Willamette River Field Guide (B)
Week 5: Destruction
M • (Oct. 26): Industrial Revolution
W • (Oct. 28): Animal Extinctions/discussion of *Destruction of the Bison*
►Essay on *Destruction of the Bison* due by 1 p.m.
F • (Oct. 30): Field Trip to Willamette River (Group 1)
S • (Oct. 31): Field Trip to Willamette River (Group 2)
►Please note that participation in the field trip is mandatory

READING ASSIGNMENT:
Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison* (entire—192 pp.)

Week 6: Reaction
M • (Nov. 2): Nature Writers
W • (Nov. 4): Transcendentalists
Journals due on Canvas by 1 p.m.

READING ASSIGNMENT:
Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (excerpts) (40 pp.)

Week 7: Imagining Nature
M • (Nov. 9): Sublime and Picturesque
W • (Nov. 11): Landscaping Nature

Week 8: Battling Nature
M • (Nov. 16): Landscapes of the Civil War
W • (Nov. 18): Agricultural Revolution/discussion of *Nature’s Metropolis*
►Essay on *Nature’s Metropolis* due by 1 p.m.

READING ASSIGNMENT:
Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis* (entire—386 pp.)

Week 9: Bodies and Nature
M • (Nov. 23): Unhealthy Landscapes
W • (Nov. 25): DAY OFF—THANKSGIVING WEEKEND—WORK ON FINAL PAPERS

Week 10: Endings
M • (Nov. 30): Sacred Spaces/Final exam study guides
W • (Dec. 2): Reflections/Review for Final
►Term paper due by 5 p.m., on Friday Dec. 4

FINALS WEEK ►T • (Dec. 8, 2:45 p.m.): Final Exam