Introduction
This course explores the dynamic field of environmental history close to home, focusing on Oregon and the Pacific Northwest. It will present and develop essential historical concepts, concerns, and methods in the context of a deep, cross-disciplinary examination of Oregon’s physical, natural, and cultural landscape.

Environmental history studies the relationship between humans and their physical environments, understanding such relationships as “dialogues” between societies and the material (including the “natural”) circumstances of their existence. Some environmental historians emphasize culture and intellectual themes, exploring the ways that people have understood and represented the natural world and shaped it (or disturbed it) in culturally specific ways. Others stress the essential economic foundations of environmental relationships, focusing on the need to procure subsistence, comfort, and wealth and the effects that such production has on physical and natural environments. Still others cast attention on the politics, policy, and legal arrangement of humans’ relationships with their environments, and how social and political life—situated in landscapes—is often the object of negotiation and conflict. Finally, others have seen environmental history as the study of
ecology, with people considered as essential (if disturbing) elements within nature. Students will become acquainted with these various approaches and the implications of different sorts of environmental history, while situating their learning in the study of Oregon and our larger region.

Learning Objectives & Outcomes
By the end of the term, you should be able to:

- Trace the history of environmental ideas and practices in Oregon from the mid-19th century to the present.
- Explain Oregon as “landscape”—that is, as physical space that is simultaneously natural and cultural.
- Trace Oregon environmental history as a process that is culturally diverse and politically contested.
- Critically analyze and interpret “primary” historical sources, the basis for historical description, analysis, and interpretation.
- Write essays that present and develop your own argument or thesis, illustrated and supported by historical evidence.
- Assess contemporary environmental problems in terms of the past that created or shaped them.

Course Format and Requirements
This course will combine lecture with discussion, often weaving the two together to make class sessions interactive. Lectures will generally build upon—not simply recapitulate—readings. Students are responsible for completing reading and writing assignments by the time indicated on the syllabus. These written assignments will often provide the basis for class activity; students are expected to attend all class meetings and participate actively. Students must complete all assignments in order to pass the course.

Assignments & Evaluation
Students in the course will write 5 short essays, based on the assigned readings, and take a final examination. Grades will be assigned according to the quality of these essays, participation in class discussion, and the final exam.

Essays (5 @ 10% each) = 50%
Participation = 25%
Final = 25%

Academic integrity is important and academic misconduct will not be tolerated. I will hold all students to the University of Oregon Student Conduct Code:
http://studentlife.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/StudentConductCode/tabid/69/Default.aspx

Essays
Essays are due in class as described in the weekly schedule below. They must directly engage the questions posed and be clear, systematically organized, supported by evidence, and competently written according to the conventions of English usage and grammar. These essays are a means of thinking through and learning about weekly course material, and they
will often form the basis for class discussion. Therefore, late essays cannot be accepted. Students must complete all five essays to fulfill the requirements of the course.

**Required Reading**


Additional required readings are available on Blackboard.

Another useful resources is the Oregon History Project: [http://www.ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/index.cfm](http://www.ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/index.cfm)

**Weekly Schedule**

**Week 1 (March 31/April 2): Introduction**  The Nature of Environmental History, its Questions in Context.


**Question for consideration:** Does nature have a history? What is “nature,” and how is it related to “culture”? How are both related to the physical world? Is history fundamentally *humanistic*, or can the non-human world—or even the nonorganic world—have “history”?

**Week 2 (April 7/9): Colonialism and Ecological Revolution.**  Native Landscapes and Colonial Contest as Environmental History.


**Essay Question 1:** Compare and contrast Native and Euro-American understandings of Oregon environments. How and why did these groups preserve, conserve, or alter these environments? Write a short essay (approximately 500-700 words, typed, double-spaced, with adequate margins) in response to these questions. Although I do not expect poetry, I do expect clear and competent writing that
adheres to grammatical convention. Writing and content are inseparable. As Ralph Waldo Emerson put it in “The Poet,” “the man is only half himself, the other half is his expression.” Due in class April 7.

Week 3 (April 14/16): Agriculture, Market Revolution, Westward Expansion.
Readings: Genesis 1: 28; short excerpts from the following: John Winthrop, “Reasons to Be Considered for Justifying the Undertakers of the Intended Plantation in New England” (1629); Robert Beverley, The History and Present State of Virginia (1705); Animal Husbandry (1775); Western Land Ordinance (1785); Northwest Ordinance (1787); Senator Thomas Hart Benton on “Manifest Destiny” (1846); Jesse S. Applegate, “Our First Winter and Summer in Oregon,” in Many Faces: An Anthology of Oregon Autobiography, 11-16; letter to Oregon Statesman (1853); letters from Chinook, Hull, and Palmer (1853), in Talking on Paper: An Anthology of Oregon Letters and Diaries (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1994), 167-70; Homestead Act (1862); lyrics of “Oregon, My Oregon” (1920) (Blackboard); Boag, Environment and Experience, Part III (through 161).

Essay Question 2: In a short essay (500-700 words) assess the concept of “improvement.” What do we mean, conventionally and historical, when we effect “improvements” on the landscape? If Oregon pioneers viewed the Willamette Valley as Eden, then why did they seek to transform it? Consider particularly “agricultural improvements,” which are critical in asserting and maintaining land claims. Due in class April 14.


Essay Question 3: How does the landscape change historically—not merely through environmental alteration, but through the cultural and historical alteration of human aesthetics and experience? How and why, for example, did assessments of wilderness change, from “hideous and howling” (according to the Puritan William Bradford) to “the preservation of the world” (in Thoreau’s words)? In a short essay (approximately 500-700 words) assess these broad questions specifically by drawing on historical evaluations of Oregon landscape. Due in class April 21.

Week 5 (April 28/30): Conservation, Preservation, Reclamation.
Readings: Robbins, Landscapes of Promise, 238-95; account of Mitchell flash flood (1884), in Talking on Paper: An Anthology of Oregon Letters and Diaries, 210-11; excerpts from the Reclamation Act (1902), the National Parks Act (1916), and the Wilderness Act (1964); Marc Reisner, “Conservation as Reclamation,” excerpted from Cadillac Desert; Donald J. Pisani, “Federal Reclamation and the American West in the 20th Century,” Agricultural History 77:3 (Summer 2003), 391-419 (Blackboard).
Begin reading Nancy Langston, Where Land & Water Meet.
Questions for consideration: what were the assumptions, goals, implications, and consequences of “reclamation” in Oregon. What was being “reclaimed,” on whose behalf and to what purpose? How did/do such reclamation compare or contrast with conservationist and preservationist efforts in Oregon.

Week 6 (May 5/7): Northwest Rivers and Salmon.

Questions for consideration: Are rivers in the Northwest today so unnatural, so altered and controlled, that they are simply machines? What about the salmon that navigate them? To paraphrase Shakespeare (*Romeo and Juliet*, II, ii, 1-2), “What’s in a name? That which we call a salmon / By any other name would smell so sweet.” Are salmon always salmon—is there a fundamental difference between hatchery-produced and wild salmon? Who decides, and what are the consequences and implications?

**Essay Question 4:** In a brief essay (500-700 words) assess Northwest rivers and fish historically as both “natural” and “man-made.” **Due in class May 5.**

Week 7 (May 12-14): Northwest Forests

Questions for consideration: What is a forest? How does a forest differ from a tree plantation? Historically, what has been the value of a forest? What compelling reasons exist to preserve forests? If they should be preserved, why or to what purpose?

Week 8 (May 19/21): Oregon and the Pacific Northwest: Klamath Basin Case Study.

Questions for consideration: How do the recent environmental and political controversies of the Klamath Basin represent, in microcosm, the legacies and dilemmas of Oregon environmental history over the last 100 years? What can the controversy tell us about Native life, dispossession, and resurgence? About the myth and history of westward expansion and the American family farm? About the nature of conservation, reclamation, and agricultural development and degradation? About the battles over water and the West? About the destruction of habitat, the threats to endangered species, and controversial efforts to preserve them? About the politics of environmental regulation, modern environmental politics, and the reactionary “Sage Brush Rebellion”? About the possibility of restoration—of natural landscapes and sustainable, peaceful social life?

**Essay Question 5:** How should the water of the Klamath Basin be allotted? Write a brief historical essay (approximately 500-700) in response to this difficult and controversial question, informed by environmental history. **Due in class May 19.**

**Memorial Day Holiday, Monday May 26.**

**Week 9 (Wednesday, May 28): Malheur Case Study:** The Physical, Natural, and Historical Landscape of Eastern Oregon.


Questions for consideration: “Whiskey’s for drinking; water’s for fighting over,” Mark Twain allegedly said. How have humans accommodated the aridity of the “Great American Desert”? How did successive human occupants of places like southeast Oregon—from Paiutes to white “pioneers” to industrial farmers and ranchers to contemporary preservationists—either adjust to the landscape or attempt to make it adjust to them? What have been the consequences? How and why has this been a source of conflict?
Can we, or how can we, manage nature? Can we avoid transforming or managing the natural world? How are these political and economic questions, not merely scientific ones? What are the lessons, potentially, of Malheur’s history, according to Nancy Langston?

**Week 10 (June 2/4): Nature/Culture and Northwest Urban Environments.**

Questions for consideration: What are the connections between cities and surrounding suburban, rural, or wilderness areas? How natural or unnatural are cities, and how natural or artificial are suburban and rural hinterlands? How would one assess the environmental history of Eugene? What can we do to make cities and towns more diverse and ecologically sustainable? Can we make them less of an impediment to species needing to change in distribution as a result of climate change? What kind of a world do we want to live in 40 years from now and 200 years from now?

**Final Examination: Tuesday, June 10, 3:15 p.m.**