Course Overview

This course will introduce students to some of the central issues and debates in American Environmental History, ranging from the period of early colonial settlement to the present day. By focusing on the complex relationship between human communities and their surrounding environments, we will explore how the natural world has shaped the social, economic, and political landscape of America, and conversely, how people have labored to transform, conserve, and appropriate nature to suit their ever-changing designs. Key topics will include: the shifting patterns of land use and resource management among Native American and settler communities; the environmental dimensions of colonization; the ecological transformations wrought by commercial agriculture and industrial capitalism; the evolving role of the state in environmental policy; the growth of conservation and environmentalism; and the changing ways in which people have conceptualized, portrayed, and interacted with the material world around them.

While the majority of our class time will be devoted to discussing the common readings, I will give a number of short lectures to provide more context, explore particular examples in greater depth, or occasionally to cover an interesting topic that simply could not be fit into the reading schedule. But I want to emphasize that class discussion is really the heart of the course—it provides an opportunity for each student to examine the issues in a critical light, to move beyond just reading “comprehension” to a deeper level of analysis in which you identify the essential components of an argument and explore how they relate to one another, and to the larger issues of the course. By sharing our different questions,
perspectives and insights, we all have an opportunity to get a better understanding of the past. It is also important to work on articulating your views to other people. Many times, we think we have a solid grasp of a topic or an argument, but then struggle to “find the words” to explain what we actually mean. This often happens when individuals sit down to write papers, and discover that their command of a topic seems to suddenly vanish as they try to actually formulate their ideas in concrete form. So I strongly urge you to participate fully in our group discussions throughout the semester. I will circulate discussion questions and topics before each class, so that you can prepare for our sessions accordingly.

The various writing assignments are also designed so that you have an opportunity to work through the web of complex issues raised by the course readings and discussion. The topics will be posted well in advance, and they will typically come from the discussion prompts. In other words, there should be no surprises. The idea is for you to approach the material in the same way that most scholars do—i.e. thinking about a set of issues over a period of time, debating your ideas with colleagues, and finally developing your arguments in compelling prose. In that spirit, I will also allow students to revise their papers and submit them for a new grade. As we approach the first assignment, I will circulate more detailed guidelines about writing, documentation, and the revision process.

**Required Texts**

All required books are available for purchase at the Campus Bookstore. A copy of each text will also be available on two hour reserve at Burling Library. There are a number of shorter articles, essays, and documents that are also required reading for the course. These will be made available through the course module (Blackboard) on Pioneer Web.


**You may use a first edition copy of these works by Cronon and Steinberg.**

**Course Requirements**

Class Attendance

Please contact me if a medical or personal issue is preventing your class attendance, and have the relevant office (Health Services or Student Affairs) do the same.
Class Participation
As mentioned above, class discussion provides our main opportunity to examine and debate the key issues of environmental history. It is crucial, therefore, that students come to each class fully prepared to engage the questions at hand. This involves not only completing the assigned readings prior to class, but also taking the appropriate time to address the discussion questions, to organize your notes accordingly, and to jot down specific examples and passages you want to highlight in class. Remember that effective note taking and class participation will lay the foundation for a focused grasp of the material, and will allow you to succeed when you return to these topics later for a paper or an exam.

Class participation accounts for 25% of your overall grade, and I take this evaluation seriously. I record a participation grade for each and every class session, using the following rubric:

A – Student arrived on time, listened attentively throughout the class or took notes; spoke at least twice; referred directly to the text, demonstrated a true command of the issues, or responded thoughtfully to another student’s comment.

B – Student was reasonably attentive and on time; they appeared to be following the discussion; they asked a question or made a general comment (or two) that showed they did the reading, but lacked specificity or interpretive focus.

C – Student was tardy or distracted during class; their contribution to the discussion was limited to either a.) a cursory comment b.) a general opinion that was not rooted in the course material c.) a question that did not show a genuine engagement with the issues

D – Student did not participate in any meaningful way in the discussion, but did attend the class and was not disruptive.

F – Student did not attend class, or was disruptive (i.e. text messaging, passing notes, talking to others, etc.).

You will receive a mid-semester participation grade, so that you are aware of where you stand in this respect.

Document Exercise (2-4 pages), due Feb. 12th
This assignment revolves around your ability to analyze a primary source from the perspective of an environmental historian. Each student will examine a small portion of Peter Kalm’s *Travels into North America*, a rich travel account written by an eighteenth-century naturalist. You will write a short essay interpreting the passage, and drawing connections to the larger themes that emerge in Cronon or Steinberg. Further guidelines will be distributed after the first week of class.

Two short papers (3-5 pages), due Feb. 22nd and Apr. 23rd
These papers will require you to engage critically with a specific historical issue or debate, drawing upon the course material to create your own analytical argument. I will post the topics on Pioneer Web at least 10 days before each deadline. All papers must be typed, double-spaced, and in a 12-point font with consistent footnotes or endnotes. Additional guidelines for the papers will be discussed in class.
Midterm Exam, Mar. 15th
This in-class exam will be comprised of historical identifications, source analysis, and/or a
map exercise. It will cover the material from weeks 1-7.

Final Project—Narrative Exercise—(5-8 pages), due May 19th
This assignment will require you to synthesize the course material, demonstrating a strong
command of the issues we have covered over the semester (both methodological and
substantive). Students will choose their own topic, and develop a narrative timeline that
identifies the essential elements of a larger story they want to tell about the environmental
history of America. An interpretive essay will accompany this timeline, explaining how
these narrative points fit together into a compelling story, and how it relates to the work of
other historians in the field. I will distribute guidelines for this project closer to the time.

Extensions & Late assignments: Late papers will receive a deduction of 1/3 of a letter grade
per day. Exceptions may be made for extraordinary medical or personal issues. Each student
is also allowed a one time extension of three days to turn in a written assignment late (the
midterm is excluded) without incurring any penalty. You should email me in advance so that
I am aware that you plan to use your extension for a particular assignment. However,
absolutely no final projects will be accepted after May 21st. The college requires that ALL
coursework be submitted by the end of exam week (unless you are taking an incomplete in
the class).

Disabilities: If you have specific physical, psychiatric or learning disabilities and require
accommodations, please let me know early in the semester so that your learning needs may
be appropriately met. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to the
Associate Dean and Director of Academic Advising, Joyce Stern, whose office is located in
Rosenfield Center (x3702).

Grades

Grades will be assigned according to the following formula:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Document Exercise</td>
<td>Feb. 12</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper #1</td>
<td>Feb. 22</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper #2</td>
<td>Apr. 23</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>Mar. 15</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Project</td>
<td>May 15</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
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<td>25%</td>
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Class Schedule & Reading Assignments

- Please read the assignments in the order in which they are listed each day.
- Also, please bring a copy of the readings along with your notes to each class so that
our discussion can be more focused & grounded (i.e. we should all be ready to refer
to specific examples or passages from the texts, and to examine them together).
### Week 1  
**Environmental History: Concepts & Approaches**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading Due</th>
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</table>
Aldo Leopold, “Bur Oak” and “Good Oak” in *Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (New York, 1949), 6-18, 26-30. (P-web) |

### Week 2  
**Two Worlds Collide: The Environmental Dimensions of Contact**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading Due</th>
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</table>
| Mon (Feb 1st): | **The Pre-Columbian Landscape**           | Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, ch. 1.  
“Native American Oral Traditions.” (P-web) |
| Fri (Feb 5th):  | **Clashing Economies & Ecologies**         | Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, ch. 2.  
Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, ch. 4 |
Week 3  Ecological Revolutions?: Explaining the Roots of Conflict

Mon.  (Feb 8th):  The Transforming Hand of Commerce  
Reading Due:  Cronon, Changes in the Land, ch. 5-6.

Wed.  (Feb 10th):  Expansion & Conflict:  The Political Ecology of Husbandry  
Reading Due:  Cronon, Changes in the Land, ch. 7.  

Fri.  (Feb 12th):  Legacies of the Market:  Cronon’s Analysis of Capitalism  
Reading Due:  Cronon, Changes in the Land, ch. 8.  
Document Exercise (due in class)

Week 4  The Rhythms of Pre-Industrial Life:  Alternative Stories about Early America

Mon.  (Feb 15th):  Concord:  Reflections from a Woodlot and a Meadow  
Reading Due:  Brian Donahue, The Great Meadow: Farmers and the Land in Colonial Concord (New Haven, 2004), preface, ch. 7. (P-web)  
Steinberg, Down to Earth, ch. 3.

Wed.  (Feb 17th):  Putting the Culture back in Agriculture  
Reading Due:  Steinberg, Down to Earth, 72-76.  

Fri.  (Feb 19th):  Understanding Space and Place  
## Section II

**Character and Commerce: The Evolution of American Society**

### Week 5  The Market Revolution: Putting Nature to Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading Due</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mon  (Feb 22nd):</strong></td>
<td>The World of Commodities</td>
<td>Steinberg, <em>Down to Earth</em>, ch. 4.</td>
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<td><em>First Paper (due in class)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fri  (Feb 26th):</strong></td>
<td>Rationalizing Nature: The Modernity of the South</td>
<td>Steinberg, <em>Down to Earth</em>, ch. 5 &amp; 7.</td>
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### Week 6  Revaluing Nature: The Politics and Meaning of “American” Landscape

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<tr>
<th>Day</th>
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<th>Reading Due</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mon  (Mar 1st):</strong></td>
<td>Romanticism, Nationalism, &amp; the Embrace of Nature</td>
<td>Perry Miller, “Nature and the National Ego,” in <em>Errand into the Wilderness</em> (Cambridge, Ma., 1956), 204-216. (P-web)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wed  (Mar 3rd):</strong></td>
<td>Landscape Paintings and the Hudson River School</td>
<td>Image Gallery of 19th Century Paintings (P-web)</td>
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</table>
Week 7  Beyond the Myths: Examining the Conquest of the American West

Mon (Mar 8\textsuperscript{th}):  \textbf{The Unforgiving Frontier}  
Reading Due:  Steinberg, \textit{Down to Earth}, ch. 8.  

Wed (Mar 10\textsuperscript{th}):  \textbf{The Hydraulic Society}  

Fri (Mar 12\textsuperscript{th}):  \textbf{Democracy and the Desert: Irrigation in the Arid West}  
Reading Due:  Worster, \textit{Rivers of Empire}, ch. 3.

Week 8  The Gospel of Efficiency: The Rise of Conservation

Mon (Mar 15\textsuperscript{th}):  \textit{Midterm Exam}

Wed (Mar 17\textsuperscript{th}):  \textbf{Conservation: Reform or Rationalization?}  
Reading Due:  Steinberg, \textit{Down to Earth}, ch. 9.

Fri (Mar 19\textsuperscript{th}):  \textbf{Conservation: Going to the Sources}  
Reading Due:  Conservation Documents (P-web).

\textit{Spring Break (March 19-April 4)}
### Section III

**Nature’s Crucible: Modernity and its Environmental Challenges**

#### Week 9  Science and the Burgeoning Environmental Movement

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#### Week 10  Consuming Nature: The Rise of Agribusiness

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<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading Due</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mon (Apr 12th)</td>
<td>The Rise of Agribusiness</td>
<td>Steinberg, <em>Down to Earth</em>, ch. 11-12.</td>
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### Week 11  Power & Modernity: The Hydraulic Empire of the West

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<th>Day</th>
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*Second Paper (due in class)*

### Week 12  The Suburban-Industrial Complex

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<th>Day</th>
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<th>Reading Due</th>
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### Week 13: Ecology and the Birth of the Environmental Movement

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<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading Due</th>
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<tr>
<td>Wed (May 5th)</td>
<td>1969—Annus Mirabilis</td>
<td>Steinberg, <em>Down to Earth</em>, ch. 15.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Fri (May 7th): Environmental Awareness: The Unlikely Catalysts of Change
Reading Due: Rome, Bulldozer in the Countryside, pp. 153-219.

Week 14 The Revolution that Never Happened

Mon (May 10th): The Rise & Fall of National Land-Use Regulation
Reading Due: Rome, Bulldozer in the Countryside, pp. 221-270.

Wed (May 12th): The Trouble with “Nature”
Reading Due: Jennifer Price, “A Brief Natural History of the Plastic Pink Flamingo,” in Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America (New York, 1999), 111-165. (P-web)

Fri (May 14th): American Capitalism Goes Global
Reading Due: Steinberg, Down to Earth, ch. 16.

Exam Week (May 17-21)

Final Project: Due Wednesday, May 19th (5:00pm)