

**Environmental Studies/History 345**  
History of American Wilderness  
Spring 2011

---

TTH, 9:40-11:20, Halsey 212

Professor: Jim Feldman  
Email: [feldmanj@uwosh.edu](mailto:feldmanj@uwosh.edu)  
Telephone: 920-424-3235

Office: 320 Swart  
Office Hours: TTH, 1:15-2:45, or by appt.

**Course Description:** What is wilderness? What are its uses? How should it best be protected? How and why have American ideas about wilderness changed over time? What human activities—if any at all—are appropriate in a wilderness? These are some of the questions that we will seek to answer in this upper-level, reading-intensive course.

American ideas about wilderness have changed markedly over time. Many Americans once saw wilderness as a negative, destructive force, and considered it to be the mission of the developing nation to conquer and subdue the wilderness. Wilderness and civilization were seen as polar opposites. Attitudes toward wilderness began to change dramatically in the nineteenth century; many people still conceived of wilderness and civilization in opposition, but believed that the problem lay in the civilized world, and that wilderness contained an antidote to a society increasingly focused on financial gain and bent on environmental ruin. As this belief gained popularity, a campaign to protect what remained of the American wilderness took root. When Congress created the National Wilderness Preservation System in 1964, many considered it the crowning achievement of the environmental movement. But in recent years, scholars and environmentalists have questioned the utility of wilderness as a conservation strategy, worrying that focusing on the distant wilderness tempts us to ignore environmental problems close to home. Others continue to believe that wilderness preservation remains the single most important goal of environmental protection. These modern disputes are often referred to as the Great New Wilderness Debate. In this course, we will explore both the history and current policy implications of these debates about the value and meaning of wilderness. We will explore both historic American ideas about wilderness as well as current concerns about its value as an idea and as a conservation strategy.

An additional goal of this class is to further your liberal arts education. What does this mean? The liberal arts education focuses on general learning, intellectual ability, and critical thinking rather than technical or professional skills. The goal of this class, then, is not just to convey specific information about environmental history (although you will learn much about this) but to teach you how to interpret this information critically, how to understand environmental history in its social, historical, and political context, and how to draw lessons from this history that might be applicable today. A liberal arts education provides the tools we need to be active citizens of our communities. As we will learn this semester, active citizenship plays a key role in resolving the complex environmental dilemmas that have faced our society for centuries.

The goals of a liberal arts education, and what it means for students at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, in particular, are laid out in our campus's Essential Learning Outcomes (<http://www.uwosh.edu/projects/lert/lert.php>). In this course, we will use our inquiries about the history of the American wilderness idea to explore the following Learning Outcomes: knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world; critical and creative thinking; written and oral communication; and knowledge of sustainability and its applications.

**Attendance, Discussion and Participation:** Your participation in discussions and other class activities is essential. This class will be run in seminar format, meaning there will be very little lecture. Come to class each day prepared to discuss the reading assigned for that day. There will be a variety of short assignments, many completed during class, throughout the semester. These will range from short writing pieces to found object exercises or internet searches. They will be collected and will count, along with your attendance and participation in class discussions, toward 30% of your grade—nearly a third of your final grade. Attendance will be taken every class meeting; your grade will begin to drop with each absence after the first one. If you have more than five unexcused absences, you will fail the course. An “unexcused absence” is any absence for which you cannot provide a note from a doctor, another professor, or some other documented explanation of your absence. If you simply cannot make a class, please get in touch with me before the class meets; perhaps an arrangement can be made to ensure that you are not penalized for missing class for legitimate reasons. There will be no opportunity to make up short assignments. Your active participation is the key to your learning the material and to the success of the course—both for you as an individual and for the class as a whole.

Please check your email account regularly for updates and last minute information about upcoming class meetings. Also, email is generally the best way to get in contact with me.

**Writing Assignments:** There are three papers for this class, one due Thursday, March 17, one due on Tuesday, May 3, and a final paper due on Thursday, May 12. All papers should be typed, double spaced, 1-inch margins, 12 point font. The first two papers should be 5 pages in length; the final research paper should be 10 pages in length. Students will choose the topic of the paper, so long as the topic is relevant to the material covered in class. All topics must be submitted, in writing, for approval no later than March 8. At various points during the semester, students will be required to turn in components of this assignment: a topic proposal, a projected thesis, a bibliography, and so on. All papers should be handed in electronic format only, on the course D2L website. We will discuss these assignments in more detail during in the semester.

### Readings

A note on the readings: the amount of reading fluctuates from week to week. Sometimes you are asked to read close to 200 pages of a single source. Try to keep your eye on the syllabus so that you can tell when the heavier reading loads are coming, and plan ahead.

The following books are available at the University Book Store in Reeve Memorial Union and on reserve at the library: Michael J. Lewis: *American Wilderness: A New History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007)

Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2002)

Electronic Reserve Readings—in an effort to save students the cost of a University-produced reading packet, a variety of course materials have been placed on the Polk Library's Electronic-Reserve. These are REQUIRED reading.

**Course Policies and Conduct** All of us must do our best to be intellectually honest and tolerant of personal differences. Environmental topics are often controversial, and we all have our own beliefs. I hope that everyone will feel safe to express an idea, even if that idea is not a popular one.

There are some university guidelines for behavior that I expect all of us to abide by, as well. One of these has to do with plagiarism, or taking credit for the work of others. This is a serious offense and will be treated according to university guidelines; failure of the course is a potential outcome of academic dishonesty. This doesn't mean you shouldn't talk with other students about what you are thinking or writing; but when you write something on a paper or exam, it must be in your own words, not copied from someone else. We will discuss what plagiarism means more fully during the course of the semester. If you have any questions about academic honesty, and what might or might not be considered plagiarism, please ask, rather than making a mistake with grave consequences.

Please let me know what I can do to accommodate any disabilities that you might have.

### Grading Breakdown and Course Requirements

Attendance, Participation	20%
Reading Responses & Short Assignments	10%
First Paper	20%
Second paper	20%
Final Paper	30%

### Grading Scale

A	93-100	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69	F	≤ 59
A-	90-92	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	63-66		
		B-	80-82	C-	70-72	D-	60-62		

## Course Schedule:

### Wk 1: Tuesday, February 1: What does wilderness mean to you?

#### Thursday, February 3: Debating the Value of Wilderness

Reading: William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," ER

**Response Paper:** What is Cronon's main argument? Do you agree with this argument? Why/why not?

### Wk 2: Tuesday, February 8: What is Wilderness, anyway?

Reading: Donald M. Waller, "Getting Back to the Right Nature," ER

Dave Foreman, "Wilderness Areas for Real," ER

Greg Aplet, Janice Thomson, and Mark Wilbur, "Indicators of Wilderness, ER

**Response Paper:** How do these authors define wilderness? Do these definitions differ from Cronon's definition of wilderness? Which definitions make the most sense to you?

#### Thursday, February 10: Pristine Wilderness?

Reading: William M. Denevan, "The Pristine Myth," ER

Melanie Perrault, "American Wilderness at First Contact," AW Ch. 2

**Post: Discussion question to D2L discussion board**

### Wk 3: Tuesday, February 15: Indian Wilderness

Reading: Chief Luther Standing Bear, "Indian Wisdom," ER

Louis Warren, *The Hunter's Game*, excerpts, ER

#### Thursday, February 17: Howling Wilderness

Reading: Mary Rowlandson, *A Narrative of Captivity & Removes*, excerpts, ER

Mark Stoll, "Religion 'Irradiates' the Wilderness," AW Ch. 3

**Post: Discussion question to D2L discussion board**

### Wk 4: Tuesday, February 22: Christianity and Wilderness

Reading: Genesis, Chapters 2-4, ER

Lynne White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," ER

Wendell Berry, "The Gift of Good Land," ER

#### Thursday, February 24: Farms, Forests, and Wilderness

Reading: Steven Stoll, "Farm against Forest," AW Ch. 4

Alan Taylor, "Wasty Ways," ER

**Response Paper:** Referring to the readings, craft an argument about how the material conditions of settlement shaped Euro-American ideas about, and attitudes towards, wilderness. Underline your thesis.

### Wk 5: Tuesday, March 1: Transcendentalists and Intellectuals

Reading: Bradley Dean, "Natural History, Romanticism, and Thoreau," AW Ch. 5

Henry David Thoreau, "Walking" and "Huckleberries," ER

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," ER

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Emerson Expounds on Nature and Wealth," 1844, ER

#### Thursday, March 3: Painting American Wilderness

Reading: Angela Miller, "The Fate of Wilderness in American Landscape Art," AW Ch. 6

### Wk 6: Tuesday, March 8: Teddy Roosevelt, Masculinity, and Wilderness

Reading: Gail Bederman, "Theodore Roosevelt: Manhood, Nation, and 'Civilization,'" ER

Theodore Roosevelt, "Hunting in the Badlands," ER

**Tentative paper topic & 10 item bibliography due in class**

#### Thursday, March 10: Women and Wilderness

Reading: Kimberly Jarvis, "Gender and Wilderness Conservation," AW Ch. 9

Susan Fennimore Cooper, *Rural Hours*, ER

**Response Paper:** How does gender inform the ways that Roosevelt and Cooper looked at nature? How does gender shape our attitudes towards nature today? Be sure to refer to the readings.

### Wk 7: Tuesday, March 15: Muir on the Mountain

Reading: John Muir, "Our National Parks," ER

Char Miller, "A Sylvan Prospect," AW Ch. 8

**Post: Discussion question to D2L discussion board**

Thursday, March 17: **First Paper Due in Class**

No Reading

**Spring Break**

**Wk 8:** Tuesday, March 29: The Wilderness Society and the Wilderness Movement

Reading: Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild*, pp. vii-xii, 1-51

**Response Paper:** How did recreation and tourism shape the conception of wilderness held by the founders of the Wilderness Society?

Thursday, March 31: Wilderness Society Politics

Reading: Sutter, *Driven Wild*, as assigned in class

**Wk 9:** Tuesday, April 5: Wilderness Society convenes

Reading: Review appropriate section of Sutter, *Driven Wild*

**Final paper topics due and 5-item annotated bibliography due**

Thursday, April 7: Postwar Wilderness and the Wilderness Act

Reading: Sutter, *Driven Wild*, 239-262

Wilderness Act of 1964, ER

Mark Harvey, "Loving the Wild in Postwar America," AW Ch. 11

**Post: Discussion question to D2L discussion board**

**Wk 10:** Tuesday, April 12: Into the Wild

Thursday, April 14: Into the Wild

**Tentative Thesis and 10-item annotated bibliography due**

**Wk 11:** Tuesday, April 19: Consequences of Wilderness

Reading: Benjamin Johnson, "Wilderness Parks and their Discontents," AW Ch. 113

James Morton Turner, "From Woodcraft to 'Leave No Trace,'" ER

Thursday, April 21: Biologists, Biodiversity, and the Wilderness Ideal

Reading: J. Baird Callicott, "The Wilderness Idea Revisited," ER

Daniel Botkin, *Discordant Harmonies*, excerpts, ER

Michael Pollan, ed., "Only Man's Presence can Save Nature," ER

**Post: Discussion question to D2L discussion board**

**Wk 12:** Tuesday, April 26: Third World Critiques of Wilderness

Reading: Ramachandra Guha, "Radical American Environmentalism," ER

Christopher Conte, "Creating Wild Places from Domesticated Landscapes," AW Ch. 13

**Response Paper:** What problems arise when the American wilderness ideal is applied in other countries? Does the importance, value, or justification for wilderness change in these other situations?

Thursday, April 28: Wilderness as Conservation Strategy

Reading: Reed Noss, "Wilderness Recovery: Thinking Big in Restoration Ecology," ER

Dave Foreman, "Wilderness: From Scenery to Nature," ER

J. Baird Callicott, "Should Wilderness Areas Become Biodiversity Reserves," ER

**Post: Discussion question to D2L discussion board**

**Wk 13:** Tuesday, May 3: **Second Paper Due in Class**

Thursday, May 5: Rethinking Wilderness

Reading: Donald Worster, "Nature, Liberty, and Equality," AW Epilogue

Jack Turner, "In Wilderness is the Preservation of the World," ER

Reed Noss, "Sustainability and Wilderness," ER

**Response Paper:** Considering these three short readings, as well as other readings from the semester, what, in your mind, is the value of wilderness?

**Wk 14:** Tuesday, May 10: Final Thoughts

Thursday, May 12: **Final Papers Due, electronic submission only, by 3:00 pm**