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. 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.

This class will also contribute to your liberal arts education. A liberal arts education focuses on general learning, intellectual ability, and critical thinking rather than technical or professional skills. The goal of this class is not just to convey information about American encounters with wilderness (although you will learn much about this) but to teach you how to interpret this information critically, and how to understand modern environmental issues in their social, historical, and political contexts.

Learning Outcomes: Upon completing this course, students will be able to:

1.) Have a basic understanding of the subject matter—the complicated ways that Americans have encountered and thought about wilderness, from colonial times to the present.
2.) Place modern debates about wilderness and nature protection in their historical context.
3.) Effectively communicate complicated ideas in a classroom setting, primarily through class discussion.
4.) Critically analyze primary source documents, and use those documents to create original arguments that explains American encounters with wilderness from diverse perspectives.
5.) Effectively communicate complicated ideas about environmental history in written format.

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 second 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. 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.
Readings: The amount of reading fluctuates from week to week. Sometimes you are asked to read close to 200 pages of a single source. Keep your eye on the syllabus so that you can tell when the heavier reading loads are coming. The following books are available at the University Book Store in Reeve and on reserve at the library:


The majority of the course readings will be available electronically through the Polk Library E-Reserve, located on the course D2L webpage. These are REQUIRED readings; you are strongly urged bring them with you to class (in print or on a laptop, iPad, or e-reader) so that you make use them to aid in class discussion.

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. 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, 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.

Knowing and applying the names and pronouns that students wish to use is a crucial part of developing a productive learning environment that fosters inclusion and personal dignity. Please let me know your preferred name and pronoun anytime before or throughout the semester.

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

Grading Breakdown and Course Requirements

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<th>Attendance, Participation</th>
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<td>First Paper</td>
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<td>Final Paper</td>
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Grading Scale

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Course Schedule:

**Wk 1:** Tuesday, February 2: What does wilderness mean to you?

**Thursday, February 4:** Debating the Value of Wilderness

Reading: William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” D2L

**Response Paper (1-2 pgs.):** What is Cronon’s main argument? Do you agree with this argument? Why/why not?

**Wk 2:** Tuesday, February 9: What is Wilderness, anyway?

Reading: Donald M. Waller, “Getting Back to the Right Nature,” D2L

Dave Foreman, “Wilderness Areas for Real,” D2L

Greg Aplet, Janice Thomson, and Mark Wilbur, “Indicators of Wildness, D2L

**Response Paper (1-2 pgs.):** 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 11: Pristine Wilderness?
Reading: William M. Denevan, “The Pristine Myth,” D2L
Melanie Perrault, “American Wilderness at First Contact,” AW Ch. 2
Chief Luther Standing Bear, “Indian Wisdom,” D2L

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

**Wk 3:** Tuesday, February 16: Howling Wilderness
Reading: Puritan primary source excerpts, D2L
Mark Stoll, “Religion ‘Irradiates’ the Wilderness,” AW Ch. 3

Thursday, February 18: Christianity and Wilderness
Reading: Genesis, Chapters 2-4, D2L
Lynne White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis,” D2L
Wendell Berry, “The Gift of Good Land,” D2L

**Response Paper (1-2 pgs.):** Referring to the readings, craft an argument about how religion shaped American ideas about nature, and speculate as well about how religion shapes modern ideas about nature and wilderness.

**Wk 4:** Tuesday, February 23: Transcendentalists and Intellectuals
Reading: Bradley Dean, “Natural History, Romanticism, and Thoreau,” AW Ch. 5
Henry David Thoreau, “Walking” and “Huckleberries,” D2L
Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Nature,” D2L
Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Emerson Expounds on Nature and Wealth,” 1844, D2L

Thursday, February 25: Teddy Roosevelt, Masculinity, and Wilderness
Reading: Gail Bederman, “Theodore Roosevelt: Manhood, Nation, and ‘Civilization,’” ER
Theodore Roosevelt, “Hunting in the Badlands,” D2L

**Wk 5:** Tuesday, March 1: Women and Wilderness
Reading: Kimberly Jarvis, “Gender and Wilderness Conservation,” AW Ch. 9
Susan Fenimore Cooper, *Rural Hours*, D2L
Isabella Bird, “A Lady’s Life in the Rocky Mountains,” D2L

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

Thursday, March 3: Muir on the Mountain
Reading: John Muir, “Our National Parks,” D2L
Char Miller, “A Sylvan Prospect,” AW Ch. 8

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

**Wk 6:** Tuesday, March 8: First Paper Due in Class
No Reading

Thursday, March 10: The Wilderness Society and the Wilderness Movement
Reading: Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild*, pp. vii-xii, 1-51

**Response Paper (1 pg.):** How did recreation and tourism shape the conception of wilderness held by the founders of the Wilderness Society?

**Wk 7:** Tuesday, March 15: Wilderness Society Politics
Reading: Sutter, *Driven Wild*, as assigned in class

Thursday, March 17: Wilderness Society convenes
Reading: Review appropriate section of Sutter, *Driven Wild*

SPRING BREAK

**Wk 8:** Tuesday, March 29: Postwar Wilderness and the Wilderness Act
Reading: Sutter, *Driven Wild*, 239-262
Wilderness Act of 1964, D2L
Mark Harvey, “Loving the Wild in Postwar America,” AW Ch. 11

Thursday, March 31: NO CLASS
**Wk 9:** Tuesday, April 5: Consequences of Wilderness  
Reading: Benjamin Johnson, “Wilderness Parks and their Discontents,” AW Ch. 7  
James Morton Turner, “From Woodcraft to ‘Leave No Trace,’” D2L

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

**Thursday, April 7: Wilderness Refined**  

**Wk 10:** Tuesday, April 12: Wilderness and Pop Culture  
Reading: Diana Saverin, “The Chris McCandless Obsession Problem,” D2L  
Watch: Into the Wild, on D2L

**Response Paper (1-2 pgs.):** Considering the movie and the article and at least one other example that you find on your own, craft an argument that explains the role of wilderness in American popular culture today.

**Thursday, April 14: Race and Wilderness**  
Reading: Paul Mohai, “Dispelling Old Myths,” D2L  
Evelyn White, “Black Women and the Wilderness,” D2L

**Wk 11:** Tuesday, April 19: Third World Critiques of Wilderness  
Reading: Ramachandra Guha, “Radical American Environmentalism,” D2L  
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 21: Biologists, Biodiversity, and the Wilderness Ideal**  
Reading: Justin Paul Smith, “The Wilderness Paradox,” D2L  
Daniel Botkin, Discordant Harmonies, excerpts, D2L  
Michael Pollan, ed., “Only Man’s Presence can Save Nature,” D2L

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

**Wk 12:** Tuesday, April 26: More Troubles With Wilderness—Considering the Anthropocene  
Reading: John Asafu-Adjaya, et al., “An Ecomodernist Manifesto,” D2L  
Emma Marris, “Ecology without Wilderness,” D2L  
Peter Kareiva and Michelle Marvier, “Conservation for the People,” D2L

**Thursday, April 28: Even More Troubles: Reconsidering the Anthropocene**  
Reading: Paul Kingsnorth, “The Rise of the Neo-Greens,” D2L  
Curt Meine, “What’s So New about the ‘New Conservation,’” D2L  
David W. Kidner, “The Conceptual Assassination of Wilderness,” D2L

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

**Wk 13:** Tuesday, May 3: Second Paper Due in Class  
Thursday, May 5: Rethinking Wilderness  
Jack Turner, “In Wildness is the Preservation of the World,” D2L  
Aldo Leopold, “Thinking Like a Mountain,” D2L

**Response Paper (1 pg.):** 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