

# History 280: United States Environmental History

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Section 1 Course Meetings: 11:00am MWF 227 CCC  
Section 2 Course Meetings: 12:00pm MWF 101 CCC

UWSP – History Department  
473 CCC  
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Office Hours: 1-3pm Wed and by appointment

## What can the past teach us about sustainability?

That question is at the root of all we'll do this semester. As an historian, I think there is no better a challenge than to teach how the past matters today. As an *environmental* historian, I further believe that the lessons of the past are—and should be—environmental lessons.

In this class, we look for lessons to guide sustainability in four places: parks, cities, farms, and forests. Each forms a unit in the class. There are certainly other ways to survey American environmental history, but this particular arrangement works very well. It encourages us to see the intellectual and cultural traditions that undergird how Americans today think about parks and cities, farms and forests.

In each unit, we will keep in mind the components of sustainability: justice, economics, and ecology. As it turns out, Americans have long thought about these themes, well before the notion of sustainability came on the scene. That's good for us, because it means we can learn from people who have already thought about the things we care about. The past is full of people who can help us decide how to build cities, farm soil, design parks, and manage forests.

About those lessons: How do we decide upon what counts as a lesson? That's the hard part. It will be part of our conversation every day. It's also the fun part.

### **Enduring Understandings:**

Sustainability requires understanding the lessons of the past.

### **Learning Outcomes:** After taking this course, students will be able to:

- Describe and explain major changes in the history of the United States environment
- Evaluate competing claims about the nation's environmental past
- Question the landscape around them with thought and care

**Course Structure:** The course has four units: farm, forest, city, and park. Each of these units is also a landscape type with its own social history, intellectual heritage, and historical ecology. In forming the class around these landscape types, my aim is to give you lots of different ways of thinking about the places you encounter everyday—and perhaps care a great deal about.

But what information are you responsible for? And how should you take notes? Each unit has a **Unit Study Guide** with keywords and questions to keep you on track. In fact, pay great attention to the Unit Study Guide. It's not optional. It contains keywords that will become multiple choice questions on the unit exam. It also contains questions about readings that will be possible quiz questions during class, as well as multiple choice questions on the exam. Know and love the Unit Study Guide.

We begin each unit with a week of lecture. I offer a basic chronology of how important ideas and major events unfolded. To reinforce the lectures, you will read short chapters from our textbook, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History* and occasionally some other brief materials posted on D2L. The Unit Study Guide contains Lecture Key Terms that you will need to take notes on, as they are possible multiple choice questions on the exam.

After the week of lecture, we will spend one day watching and/or discussing a short film. I like to insert the film here because it's a good visual break. A film also brings new perspectives into our inquiry—and that's the real reason I include them. The Unit Study Guide has Film Key Terms that will appear as multiple choice questions on the exam and Film Questions that will be both possible quiz questions (at the beginning of the film discussion day) and possible exam multiple choice questions.

Next, we arrive at the heart of the unit: the book. I have chosen smart and accessible books that will each let us dig deeper into the history of cities, forests, farms, or parks. The Unit Study Guide has Book Key Terms that will appear as multiple choice questions on the exam and Book Questions that will be both possible quiz questions (at the beginning of the day the relevant pages are due) and possible exam multiple choice questions.

A document discussion will be the last work of the unit before the exam. In advance of this day, you will read brief historical documents accessed via D2L. The Unit Study Guide contains questions that will be both possible quiz questions (at the beginning of this day) and possible exam multiple choice questions.

Exams will be multiple choice. The best way to study is to complete the Unit Study Guide as we work through the unit and then review your work in the few days before the exam.

There is one final and large assignment after the four units are completed. It's the Place Paper. At the end of the semester, you will do some light research but deep thinking about a place largely of your own choosing. It's the culminating work of the semester and takes the place of a final exam. It's due at the final exam date.

**Graded Assignments:** There are **four exams** (one at the end of each unit), a **final paper** called the "Place Paper," and a **participation** grade.

The four exams are multiple choice. See the Unit Study Guides on D2L for the best way to study. The final paper, aka "Place Paper," will be about 1200 words, due on the final exam date. An assignment description will be on D2L. Participation comes from quizzes.



**A Note About Writing:** This semester I am departing from written exams, but I'm still assigning a good amount of writing. The Place Paper is the obvious example. But there will also be frequent, ungraded in-class writing that will help move our discussions forward. In fact, this type of focused writing will show you that the simple act of writing can be a great tool in helping you learn. We'll do a lot of it.



**Office Hours:** You are welcome to visit me in my office. I set aside office hours so that I have the chance to talk with students one-on-one. During Wednesdays 1-3pm (473 CCC), I do not have any other commitments. My only commitment is to speak with my students.

To visit me during office hours you *do not need an appointment*. We can chat about anything going on in the course, from content to class dynamics. They are an especially good time to check in if you missed class. If you have class or work during my office hours, I am happy to make an appointment. Just email me.

### Text Rental Readings:

Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History*, any edition.

“not dry like normal textbooks!”—actual student

### Purchase Books:

Richard Manning, *Grassland: The History, Biology, Politics, and Promise of the American Prairie* (New York: Penguin, 1995). Any edition.

William Dietrich, *The Final Forest: The Battle for the Last Great Trees of the Pacific Northwest* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992). Any edition.

James Longhurst, *Bike Battles: A History of Sharing the American Road* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015). Any edition.

**D2L:** There will be some non-book readings and they'll be available on D2L.

**Grading:** 20 points for **Participation** + 20 points for **Exam One** + 30 points for **Exam Two** + 40 points for **Exam Three** + 40 points for **Exam Four** + 50 points for the **Final Paper** = 200 semester points.

Letter grades for the semester follow the typical pattern:

A 93-100	B+ 87-89.99	C+ 77-79.99	D+ 67-69.99	F 59.99 and below
A- 90-92.99	B 83-86.99	C 73-76.99	D 60-66.99	
	B- 80-82.99	C- 70-72.99		

**Advice from Previous Students:** Why listen just to me? Here is what your predecessors want to tell you:

“Read the material and attend class.”

“Attend class, pay attention and from there it’s not hard to do well in the class.”

“Stay caught up on the readings and highlight for the paper at the end.”

“Stay on top of the reading. It’s not too hard and the lectures cover the material, but the text gives a lot of depth and examples.”

“Keep up with the readings.”

“Come ready to participate and add to the discussion.”

“Make sure to do all the assigned reading *before* class.”

“Don’t fall behind on readings and coursework.”

“Be in class every day.”

“Attend class regularly.”

“Come to class with an open mind.”

“Involve yourself in the reading, thinking about how you could apply it to what you care about.”

“Be prepared to read! Pick up on little things.”

“Look beyond just the facts, because it is a very beneficial class.”

“Come to class and speak up. Participate. I found the class much more interesting when more people took part.”



**Who Should Take This Class?** Whatever your major, this course has something to offer you.

If you are training to be a teacher, you will find that a great way to connect with students is by telling them the stories hidden in the landscapes around them.

For history majors, layering the environment into your own understanding of the past will enrich your studies, leading to new questions about history.

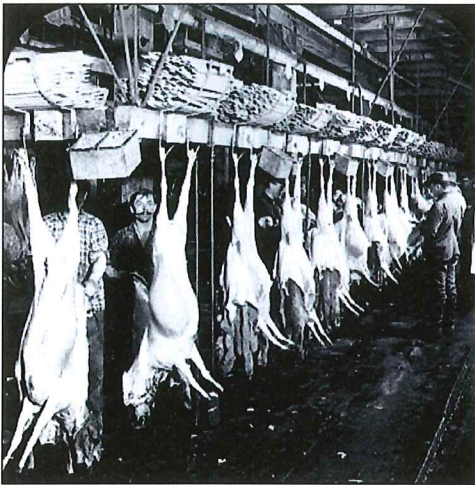
Some students in this class will eventually work in natural resources, for which an understanding of past environments can help inform present policy decisions.

For everyone, environmental history offers the tools *to think critically about the environment as a citizen*.

**Course Policies:** During the class, cell phones and other electronic devices are prohibited. If you are a parent or are otherwise obligated to be available to your family via cell phone, then please discuss that situation with me, so I know that you have a good reason for keeping your phone turned on.

The prohibition of electronics also extends to laptop computers (unless approved by the Learning Technology Center). While laptops are great aides in studying, the focus in class is on class, not the computer screen. If you do prefer to have your notes in a computer file, you will find that typing them from your handwritten notes will aid you greatly in digesting the material.

For information on plagiarism, consult <http://www.uwsp.edu/centers/rights>. See Chapter 14, *Student Academic Standards and Disciplinary Procedures*, pages 5 -10, for the disciplinary possibilities if you are caught cheating. As an instructor deeply concerned with fairness in the classroom, I pursue each and every case of plagiarism and cheating. Please note that turnitin.com is used for the essay assignments.



**Life Happens:** I understand you have a life outside this class. I understand that life might make it difficult to complete some assignments, attend class, or simply to do well. I do my best to be flexible because I know those circumstances are out of your control and my control. I'm on your team.

I also know that some real learning has to take place in this class. You will have more opportunity in life if you understand history, read critically, and write well. This class has to be one of your priorities. I do my best to be flexible, but I have to adhere to some standards. If something comes up, let's talk.

**Equity of Educational Access:** If you have a learning or physical challenge which requires classroom accommodation, please contact the UWSP Disability Services office with your documentation as early as possible in the semester. They will then notify me, in a confidential memo, of the accommodations that will facilitate your success in the course. Disability Services Office, 103 Student Services Center, Voice: (715) 346-3365, TTY: (715) 346-3362, <http://www.uwsp.edu/special/disability/studentinfo.htm>.

**Note:** The syllabus is a general plan for the course. Deviations announced in class may be necessary.

Schedule		Finish readings before class on the day listed.		
<b>Why the History of the Environment Matters</b>				
Week 1 Jan 25-30	<u>Monday</u> Introduction	<u>Wednesday</u> Introduction “Preface,” “Prologue,” “Wilderness Under Fire” <i>in Down to Earth (DE)</i>	<u>Friday</u> Introduction “A Truly New World” <i>DE</i>	
<b>FARM: How did farming transform North American ecology and communities?</b>				
Week 2 Feb 1-5	<u>Monday</u> Lecture “Reflections from Woodlot” (DE)	<u>Wednesday</u> Lecture “King Climate in Dixie” “Extracting New South” (DE)	<u>Friday</u> Lecture “Moveable Feast” (DE)	
Week 3 Feb 8-12	<u>Monday</u> Viewing Quiz and Film Discussion <i>Why Bracero?</i> and <i>Harvest of Shame (D2L)</i>	<u>Wednesday</u> Reading Quiz and Book Discussion <i>Grassland</i> 62-109	<u>Friday</u> Reading Quiz and Book Discussion <i>Grassland</i> 110-168	
Week 4 Feb 15-19	<u>Monday</u> Reading Quiz and Book Discussion <i>Grassland</i> 217-260	<u>Wednesday</u> Reading Quiz and Document Discussion “Agribusiness” and “Becoming Native” (D2L)	<u>Friday</u> <b>EXAM ONE</b>	
<b>FOREST: How are forests not just natural, but also political?</b>				
Week 5 Feb 22-26	<u>Monday</u> Lecture “World of Commodities” (DE) (esp. 62-67)	<u>Wednesday</u> Lecture “Conservation Reconsidered” (DE) (esp. 138-144)	<u>Friday</u> Viewing Quiz and Film Discussion <i>Politics of Trees (D2L)</i>	
Week 6 Feb 29- Mar 4	<u>Monday</u> Reading Quiz and Book Discussion <i>Final Forest</i> , 15-71	<u>Wednesday</u> Reading Quiz and Book Discussion <i>Final Forest</i> , 72-132	<u>Friday</u> Reading Quiz and Book Discussion <i>Final Forest</i> , 133-177	
Week 7 Mar 7-11	<u>Monday</u> Reading Quiz and Book Discussion <i>Final Forest</i> , 178-235	<u>Wednesday</u> Reading Quiz and Document Discussion “Whose Nature?” D2L	<u>Friday</u> <b>EXAM TWO</b>	
<b>CITY: How does nature matter to a city?</b>				
Week 8 Mar 14-18	<u>Monday</u> Lecture “City and Nature” (D2L) “Green Manhattan” (D2L)	<u>Wednesday</u> Lecture “Death of Organic City” (DE) “America in Black and Green” (DE)	<u>Friday</u> Reading Quiz and Book Discussion <i>Bike Battles</i> , 3-21	
<b>SPRING BREAK</b>				
Week 9 Mar 28- Apr 1	<u>Monday</u> Viewing Quiz and Film Discussion <i>River Under the City of Angels (D2L)</i>	<u>Wednesday</u> Reading Quiz and Book Discussion <i>Bike Battles</i> , 22-79	<u>Friday</u> Reading Quiz and Book Discussion <i>Bike Battles</i> , 152-185	
Week 10 Apr 4-8	<u>Monday</u> Reading Quiz and Book Discussion <i>Bike Battles</i> , 186-241	<u>Wednesday</u> Question Preparation (Counts as Quiz) and Author Visit	<u>Friday</u> <b>EXAM THREE</b>	
<b>PARK: Why do we have parks?</b> (Note: D2L readings replace the book in this unit.)				
Week 11 Apr 11-15	<u>Monday</u> Lecture No reading	<u>Wednesday</u> Lecture “American Park Movement” (D2L)	<u>Friday</u> Viewing Quiz and Film Discussion <i>Beach Bill</i>	

<b>Week 12</b> <b>Apr 18-22</b>	<u>Monday</u> Reading Quiz and Article Discussion "Constructing Nature" D2L	<u>Wednesday</u> Reading Quiz and Article Discussion "Savage Dreams" 215-293 (D2L)	<u>Friday</u> Reading Quiz and Article Discussion "Savage Dreams" 294-385 D2L
<b>Week 13</b> <b>Apr 25-29</b>	<u>Monday</u> Reading Quiz and Article Discussion "Trouble with Wilderness" D2L	<u>Wednesday</u> Reading Quiz and Document Discussion TBA	<u>Friday</u> <b>EXAM FOUR</b>
<b>Place Paper</b>			
<b>Week 14</b> <b>May 2-6</b>	<u>Monday</u> Paper Workshop	<u>Wednesday</u> Paper Workshop	<u>Friday</u> Paper Workshop
<b>Week 15</b> <b>May 9-13</b>	<u>Monday</u> Presentations	<u>Wednesday</u> Presentations	<u>Friday</u> Presentations
<b>Final Exam</b> <b>Week May</b> <b>16-20</b>	<b>Paper Due in D2L by 3pm</b> <b>Tuesday, May 17th</b>		