

# American Wilderness

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Andrew Turchon

Monday (6:00-8:30)

Office Hours: by appointment

[aturchon@revere.mec.edu](mailto:aturchon@revere.mec.edu)

**Required Texts:** available at the Tufts bookstore and elsewhere

1. Cronon, William. *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*. New York: W.W. Norton &, 1996. Print.
2. Nash, Roderick. *Wilderness and the American Mind*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2001. Print.
3. Waterman, Guy & Laura. *Wilderness Ethics: Preserving the Spirit of Wildness*. S.I.: W W Norton, 2014. Print.

\*Many readings for this course will be made available through Schoology.

## **Essential Questions and Class Overview:**

What is wilderness? Is the presence of wilderness essential for the many millions who will never venture into the mountains or plunge into canyons beyond where pavement ends and backcountry begins? How have American attitudes toward nature shifted during the course of our nation's history and how have these attitudes shaped both public policy and the landscape itself? In this class we will examine (through literature, scholarship, and art) the relationship that early settlers established with the landscape they so desperately aimed to cultivate. We will then look at how explorers, fortune seekers, philosophers, industrialists, writers, and mountain walkers qualify the American wilderness in a variety of ways: to some it is acres of harvestable timber and agricultural land, to others, the manifestation of the sublime and "the preservation of the world." We will be examining and questioning these cultural conventions as they relate to the evolution of the environmental and conservation movement in the United States. Our work in this regard will culminate with an in-depth study of the Wilderness Act of 1964 and its implications for land management policy over the last five decades.

## **Class Expectations:**

Conspicuous attendance is required in this course. Since this is a relatively small class, it is paramount that you attend class regularly. If you cannot be in class, please let me know ahead of time. As a courtesy to your classmates, please make sure that you are on time for class.

## **Course Grading:**

1. Attendance and Class Participation (10%)
2. 2-3 Written Reflections (20%)
3. Home Cosmography (15%)
4. Place Paper (25%)
5. Land Management Project (30%)

### **Class 1:** What is wilderness?

We will introduce the class and the objectives. We will review class policies, expectations, and requirements for the semester. Since this class is student-centered our discussion will focus on your interest in the subject matter (complete the *Personal Information Sheet*), your prior knowledge and what you expect to get out of this class. Additionally, we will introduce the major themes and examine early perceptions of American wilderness and discuss how they compare with our modern attitudes towards wilderness.

#### In-class readings:

1. Winthrop, John. *The Journal of John Winthrop*, 1630-1649, (pp. 393-394).
2. Waterman, Laura, and Guy Waterman. *Forest and Crag: A History of Hiking, Trail Blazing, and Adventure in the Northeast Mountains*. Boston, MA: Appalachian Mountain Club, 1989. (7-20).
3. Josselyn, John. *New England Rarities*, 1663 & 1683.

#### Activities:

1. Nature/wilderness association and our relationship with nature (individually)
2. Semantic mapping of "Wilderness" (small-group)
3. Discussion (whole-group)

#### Homework:

1. Chapters 1-2 in *Wilderness & The American Mind*

\*Write a 2-3 page journal summarizing critical themes within the text. Include textual evidence that helps you elucidate your understanding of the text. (see attached Criteria for Success rubric)

### **Class 2:** America's "daunting and terrible" wilderness

Our focus is the early exploration and cultivation of the New World's "daunting and terrible" conception of wilderness. Discussion will focus on the myths and legends surrounding the Old Testament and the attitudes of early American frontiersmen and the "absurdity" of preservation.

Debate: To what extent is the colonial conception of wilderness a product of the Old World versus the New World?

#### In-class readings:

The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492, pgs. 370-381

The Journals of Lewis and Clarke: Chapter 18-Crossing the Rocky Mountains, 1810.

Waterman, Guy and Laura, *Forest and Crag*, 1989, pgs. 1-5.

Petrarch, F., *The Ascent of Mount Ventoux*

Viewing: an assortment of popular movie clips

#### Homework:

1. Chapters 3-5 in *Wilderness & The American Mind*.

2. Selections from the *Romantics On The Mountaintop* handout

\*As you read use an analytical lense in considering how each author depicts nature in their writing. We will discuss these unique perspectives during next class.

### **Class 3:** "god was more easily found in nature than in the works of man." -Emerson.

We will examine the art, writing, and scholarship created by those individuals in search of the spiritual, scientific, and sublime in the woods and mountains of New England from around 1830-1870. We will evaluate the role that contrasting visions of landscape during the Romantic

Movement had on nationalistic ambitions and the American belief in a “destiny for literary excellence”.

In-class readings:

1. Thoreau, Henry David. *Walking*. S.I.: Cricket House, 2010. Print. (excerpts)
2. <http://transcendentalism-legacy.tamu.edu/authors/thoreau/>
3. <http://transcendentalism-legacy.tamu.edu/authors/fuller/>
4. <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/authors/emerson/nature.htm>

\*introduction to Home Cosmography Project

**Homework:**

1. Chapters 6-8 in *Wilderness & The American Mind*
2. Thomas Cole, “Essay on American Scenery” 1836.
3. Catlin, George. *The Manners, Customs and Conditions of the North American Indians*. London: Published by the Author, at the Egyptian Hall, Picadilly, 1841. 259-264.

**Class 4:** “Millions of acres have been redeemed from wilderness by the hand of man.” -Census Bureau 1890.

We will focus on Americas’ westward expansion, the utilitarian perspective of nature and the echoing cries for preservation, including those of Transcendentalists such as Thoreau, writers and artists such as George Caitlin, Thomas Moran, William Cullen Bryant, Albert Bierstadt, and Francis Parkman. This period of time marks a shift in attitudes towards nature culminating in the creation of the world’s first national park: Yellowstone National Park.

Viewing: The National Parks: America’s Best Idea

In-class readings:

1. Spence, Mark David. *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. Print.
2. Journal excerpts of George Bird Grinnell and Theodore Roosevelt
3. Siber, Kate. "Standing Guard Meet America's Buffalo Soldiers." *National Parks* Autumn 2012: 28-34. Print.

**Homework:**

1. \*Home Cosmography due
2. Turner, Frederick Jackson. *The Frontier in American History*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962. 243-247-47. Print.

**Class 5:** “The Wild West is tamed, and its savage charms have withered.” F. Parkman

We will explore the shifting attitudes towards nature as a place to seek out, experience, and preserve as well as exploit, utilize, and develop (1870-1910). We will also discuss the governments’ role in setting the preservationist agenda as well as the birth of the Appalachian Mountain Club (1876), Sierra Club (1892) and other organizations.

Activity: National Summit on the Forest Reserve Act

Readings:

1. Chapters 11-12 in *Wilderness & the American Mind*.
2. John Muir, *My First Summer In The Sierras* (excerpts)
3. Viewing: *In The Light of Reverence*. Dir. Malinda Maynor and Christopher McLeod. PBS, 2001.

**Homework:**

Assignment: read chapters (1-3) in *My First Summer In The Sierras*. Identify three passages from the text. Write a reflection on how Muir values wilderness? How does this differ from the standard conception of wilderness at the time? How does Muir use language to persuade?

**Class 6:** National Preservation

Tonight's class will focus on the federal land management entities created to preserve and manage land set aside from an increasingly urbanized civilization (1890-1940). We will look at the Antiquities Act, Forest Reserve Act, the birth of the National Park system, National Forest Service, and the Weeks Act 1911, which created the White Mountain National Forest.

Video viewing: The History of the Weeks Act and The Greatest Good

Readings:

1. [http://whitemountainhistory.org/uploads/Weeks\\_Act\\_Bibliography\\_-\\_February\\_2011\\_rev.pdf](http://whitemountainhistory.org/uploads/Weeks_Act_Bibliography_-_February_2011_rev.pdf)
2. <http://www.foresthistory.org/ASPNET/Policy/WeeksAct/index.aspx>
3. <http://www.fs.fed.us/greatestgood/index.shtml>

\*introduction to Place Paper

**Homework:**

1. Chapters (10, 13,14) in *Wilderness & The American Mind*.
2. Middlesex Fells Management Plan  
*Reservation*<http://www.mass.gov/dcr/news/publicmeetings/materials/rmp/midfellspresentation2011-9-14.pdf>

**Class 7:** The Paradox of Preservation

Field Excursion to Middlesex Fells Reservation or Blue Hills Reservation.

Discussion: The paradoxes of preservation, Leave-No-Trace, and the current multi-use management of the park currently being debated by the (DCR) Department of Conservation and Recreation and the Friends of the Fells.

1. Chapter 9 in *Wilderness & the American Mind*
2. *Wilderness Ethics: Preserving the Spirit of Wilderness, Chapters 1-4 (pgs. 18-41)*.

**Homework:**

\*Fay's Quandary paper (see handout).

**Class 8:** Hetch Hetchy

Tonight we will focus on one of the most controversial environmental issues of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: Hetch Hetchy. This debate pitted the "nature as temple" philosophy of John Muir versus the utilitarian philosophy of Gifford Pinchot, the Chief Forester, in his attempt to provide fresh water for San Francisco.

Class Readings:

1. "To dam or not to dam": The fight over Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park, Jones, Holway R.
2. *John Muir and the Sierra Club; The Battle for Yosemite*, pp. 28-40. San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1965.
3. House Committee on the Public Lands, *Hetch Hetchy Dam Site*, 63rd Cong., 1st sess. (25-28 June 1913; 7 July 1913), (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913), 25-29, 165-66, 213-14, 235-38.
4. <http://www.hetchhetchy.org/>

\*Introduction of Place Paper

**Homework:**

1. Reading the WILDERNESS ACT of 1964.  
[http://www.wilderness.net/NWPS/documents//publiclaws/PDF/16\\_USC\\_1131-1136.pdf](http://www.wilderness.net/NWPS/documents//publiclaws/PDF/16_USC_1131-1136.pdf)

2. Abbey, Edward. *Desert Solitaire*. Tucson: University of Arizona, 1988. (pgs. 1-73) Print.

**Class 9:**

Tonight's class will focus on the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the "Backpacking Revolution". We will talk about the Wilderness Society, the Nature Conservancy, and other critical legislation. We will also discuss the spiritual side of the wilderness and the emerging need to for a backcountry land ethic.

In-class project: Planning a trip to the wilderness

**Class Readings:**

1. Cronon, William. *The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature*. New York: Norton, 1995. Print.
  2. White, Evelyn. "Black Women In The Wilderness". Pgs 1062-1067.
  3. Lane, Kristen. "The Risks and Rewards of Hiking Solo Out There." *Appalachian Mountain Club* (2013): 34-37.
- \*Introduction to Land Management Project

**Homework:**

1. Chapters 15-16 in *Wilderness & the American Mind*.
2. Place Paper due next class

**Class 10:** Autumn Wilderness Excursion

We will travel north to spend a night at the LODGE in the White Mountain National Forest. We will spend a full day hiking in the Pemigewasset Wilderness.

\*Guest speaker from the Appalachian Mountain Club's Alpine Stewardship Program

Viewing: *Livable Landscapes* or *History of the Weeks Act*.

**Homework:**

1. Finish Wilderness Ethics
2. Audre Lorde, "Every Traveler Has One Vermont Poem"
3. Complete Place Paper

**Class 11:** Long Distance Hiking: Appalachian Trail, Pacific Crest Trail, and Continental Divide

Students will continue to work on their Land Management Project for part of class. During the second part of class we will have a small panel of "thru" hikers come to speak to us.

\* Place Paper due

**Class 12:** Socratic Seminar

We will be engaging in a Socratic Seminar on a menagerie of popular and hotly contested land use issues in the rivers, mountains, and deserts of the United States. We will examine the use of technology in the backcountry; backcountry skiing and the "improvement" of trails; snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles and mountain biking; the cost and responsibility of search and rescue.

\*Class evaluation

**Class 13:** Final Projects presented.

**December ?<sup>th</sup>:** Final grades due at the Ex. College