Nature, Wilderness, and Conservation:
Examining Our Assumptions About the Natural World

WFC 198
2 Units
Winter Quarter 2014
Meeting Time: 3:10-4:00 on Tuesday and Thursday
Room: Academic Surge 1064 (Tues), Academic Surge 1371 (Thurs)

Instructor: Evan Eskew
Office: Academic Surge 1059
Office Hours: By Appointment
Email: eaeskew@ucdavis.edu
Course Description:
The aim of this course is to explore and critically assess attitudes and assumptions regarding nature conservation. I'll assume you have some basic knowledge of conservation biology and the primary stressors affecting biodiversity (i.e., habitat degradation/loss/fragmentation, overharvesting, invasive species, climate change, and disease). Within the scientific community, there is little debate that these factors contribute substantially to species endangerment, and therefore we will discuss them sparingly. With a focus on conservation in the United States, we will first investigate the people and ideas that have shaped our understanding of nature and its relation to humans. We will then use this knowledge base to engage with a variety of ongoing debates surrounding appropriate conservation practice. I hope this course will expose you to a wide variety of environmental thinkers, allow you to wrestle with important conservation questions, and help you to understand the cultural contexts within which conservation practitioners must operate.

Required Readings:
Students are expected to read and be familiar with the writings and articles we will discuss in class as well as any background material needed on an individual basis to fully understand the course content. Specific readings are listed in the course schedule below. Readings are subject to change throughout the quarter.

Course and Grading Policies:
Grading for this course is on a Pass/Not Pass basis. Because the course is completely discussion-based, student evaluation for the quarter will be based on two major components: 1) performance as discussion leader and 2) daily participation in discussion. Specifically, individual students will be responsible for leading discussion twice during the quarter. Students will be assigned discussion topics at the first class meeting. Discussion leaders are expected to generate 6-8 quality discussion questions to help guide discussion during their session. These questions are to be submitted to me at the beginning of the relevant class period (hard or electronic copies are acceptable). Although I have chosen course topics and readings, discussion leaders are welcome to assign other short readings and/or present other materials if they will enhance discussion. If there are other materials you would like class members to review before your discussion session (e.g., other articles, videos, websites, etc.), get them to me at least three days prior to your discussion so I can send them out to the entire class. Finally, the discussion leader will give a short summary of the day’s primary discussion points during the final two minutes of each class session. If needed, I can assist you in developing questions or aid in finding other resources. Any requests for help should be communicated to me at least five days prior to your discussion session. I expect everyone to participate during class by taking part in discussion, asking questions, and making meaningful comments. To receive a passing grade in the course, students will need to demonstrate substantive discussion participation in at least 75% of class sessions. I expect students to be on time to class so we can all begin a productive discussion on schedule. Tardiness and lack of attendance will be counted against discussion participation.
Course Schedule:

**Meeting 1 - Jan 9**
Course Introduction

No reading assignment

**Meeting 2 - Jan 14**
Nature, an American Perspective - Part I


**Meeting 3 - Jan 16**
Nature, an American Perspective - Part II

Muir, J. 1876. “God’s First Temples.”

Muir, J. 1912. “Hetch Hetchy Valley.”


**Meeting 4 - Jan 21**
Questioning Our Conception of Nature


**Meeting 5 - Jan 23**
Environmentalism, Imperialism


**Meeting 6 - Jan 28**
Were Natives Better for Nature?


Meeting 7 - Jan 30  
What Are We Trying to Get Back to? The Problem of Shifting Conservation Baselines


Meeting 8 - Feb 4  
A Controversial Conservation Baseline: Pleistocene Re-wilding


Meeting 9 - Feb 6  
Economic Valuation and Ecosystem Services: A Service to Nature?


Meeting 10 - Feb 11  
Getting Our Priorities Straight

http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/animal_forecast/2013/02/conservation_triage_which_species_should_be_saved.single.html


Article to skim:

Meeting 11 - Feb 13
What’s a Species Even Worth?


Meeting 12 - Feb 18
Make Peace with the Aliens?


Read the four responses to Davis et al. 2011 from Nature 475:36-37.


Larson, B. 2008. Friend, foe, wonder, peril: invasive species are all of these. Alternatives Journal 34:14-17.

Meeting 13 - Feb 20
A More Idealistic Form of Conservation


Meeting 14 - Feb 25
Conservation as a Personal Mission: The Case of Timothy Treadwell

Discussion of the film Grizzly Man

Meeting 15 - Feb 27
Nature, Race, and Ethnicity


Browse the website designed to accompany the 2004 article “Apartheid in the Great Outdoors: American advertising and the reproduction of a racialized outdoor leisure identity.” http://www.u.arizona.edu/~derekcmartin/

Meeting 16 - Mar 4
Having Faith: Religious Thought in Conservation


Meeting 17 - Mar 6
Watching the World Burn


Meeting 18 - Mar 11
Humans Behaving Badly


Meeting 19 - Mar 13
The Future of Conservation Biology


Optional commentary on this article:
http://www.nature.org/ourscience/ourscientists/the-end-of-the-wild.xml

