HISTORY/GEOGRAPHY 932
TOPICS IN AMERICAN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY:
DESIGNING A COURSE ON THE MAKING OF THE AMERICAN LANDSCAPE

Instructor: Bill Cronon, 443 Science Hall.
Phone: 265-6023; this has an answering machine, and I'll try to reply to messages as quickly as I can.

No calls to my home phone number, please. Your best bet for a quick reply is almost always to email me rather than phone, at wcronon@wisc.edu.

Office Hours: 9:30-11:30am, Tuesday mornings, first come, first served, at 5103 Humanities, or at other times by appointment (meetings by appointment are generally in 443 Science Hall). I would prefer to see you during regular office hours, but will schedule other times if necessary. Please don't just stop by my office if you need to see me at times other than my office hours, however; email me first to make an appointment.

Course Website: Bill’s website is at www.williamcroron.net, and the page for this course can be found at http://www.williamcronon.net/courses/932/. Be sure to bookmark and keep track of this link, since the page will have links and other materials helpful for students in the course. If you happen to lose track of it, a Google search of “cronon 932” will likely yield this page as the top hit.

Course Description
The seminar is a one-semester introduction to some of the most interesting recent literature of American environmental history, read principally for the theories and methodologies it can offer scholars and scientists as well as its implications for contemporary environmental politics and management. The seminar assumes no previous coursework in the field, and students with a wide variety of backgrounds and disciplines are encouraged to participate. We will read a number of the most important works that have been produced in the field during the past twenty years, with an eye to exploring the different themes and methods that have shaped this body of scholarship. We will concentrate mainly on what might be called the "second generation" of writing in environmental history, trying to assess how the field has evolved and where it might be headed in the future, but will also review some classic texts to see how the field has changed over time. Our goal will be to evaluate these texts with a critical but sympathetic eye, trying to discover ways in which their approaches might be helpful to our own work. At the same time, we'll use this literature to think about the more general process of conceiving, conducting, and writing research about the past (whether within the disciplines of history, geography, ecology, environmental studies, natural resource management, or what have you) trying to gain as much practical wisdom as we can about how to do theses and dissertations.

As is typical of the field itself, we will be approaching environmental history from at least three different angles. First, we will ask how various human activities have historically depended on and interacted with the natural world: how have natural resources shaped the patterns of human life in different regions of the continent? Second, we will try to trace the shifting attitudes toward nature held by Americans during different periods of their nation's history: how have the human inhabitants of this continent perceived and attached meanings to the world around them, and how have those attitudes shaped their cultural and political lives? Finally, we will ask how human attitudes and activities have worked together to reshape the American landscape: how have people altered the world around them, and what have been the consequences of those alterations for natural and human communities alike?
We will approach these broad questions not through a chronological survey of all American history, but rather through an eclectic series of case studies focusing on different approaches and questions that have guided environmental historians in their work. (If you’re interested in a more chronological survey of the field, you’re encouraged to take or audit History/Geography/Environmental Studies 460, my environmental history lecture course, or History/Geography/Environmental Studies 469, which takes a more historical geographical approach to the same subject.) Among other topics, we will discuss the concept "nature" as it relates to this field; the risks and opportunities of using scientific research to make claims about past environmental change, and, conversely, the risks and opportunities of bringing historical perspectives to scientific scholarship; different narrative and metanarrative strategies that have organized environmental storytelling; the political history of conservation and environmentalism; the relation of environmental history to social and cultural history; and possible contributions that environmental history might make to contemporary environmental controversies and policy-making.

For all students, one of our foremost concerns will be to explore the problems and opportunities this field offers for research and teaching so that seminar participants can work in it themselves if they so choose. Finally, because environmental history has been unusually successful among academic fields in reaching sizable public audiences for its work, we will spend a fair amount of time discussing the practice of science and scholarship in the public realm, thinking about ways to communicate effectively with audiences beyond the academy.

**Course Reading Assignments**
Reading assignments are quite extensive, averaging 200-300 or more pages per week, but are generally not difficult and have been chosen as much as possible for their readability. Required readings are listed in the weekly outline that follows; most are articles and book excerpts.

*Note that there is an all-day class field trip scheduled on Saturday, September 24 from 8am-5pm.*
SYLLABUS, READINGS, AND HOMEWORK

NB: Additional reading and writing assignments will be added after initial class discussions of how we would like to focus our work for the semester.

September 6: Introductory
Organization and requirements of the course, introductions, discussion of syllabus and options regarding written work.

September 13: What Is Environmental History and How Should We Do It?
Raymond Williams, “Nature,” Keywords, 184-89.
Oxford English Dictionary, entry on “Nature.”
Donald Worster et al., "Environmental History: A Round Table," Journal of American History (March 1990), 1087-1147.

September 20: Reading the Landscape
Peruse the “How to Read a Landscape” web page on the “Learning Historical Research” website at http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/, as well as CHE’s “Reading an Urban Landscape”: http://nelson.wisc.edu/che/events/place-based-workshops/2009/project/index.php; also peruse Forest Hill Cemetery website as possible model: http://foresthill.williamcronon.net
Grady Clay, “Breaks,” in Close-Up: How to Read the American City (1973), 38-52. (Library E-reserves)


**Assignment:** Come to class prepared to talk for 3-5 minutes about a tentative topic about which you're thinking about writing a literature review. If you have more than one topic under consideration, it’s fine to name 2-3 possible topics, but if so, make sure you discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each and the criteria you’re using to try to choose among them.

**IMPORTANT:** Independent of this week’s readings, you should begin perusing three large volumes consisting entirely of literature reviews highly relevant to your final paper:


**September 24:** Special Mandatory All-Day Saturday Field Trip

**September 27: Big Stories**


**Assignment:** You should be able to give a definitive description of the topic of your literature review by today (next week at the very latest—but the sooner you can decide, the better.) You should already be building a bibliography of the books and articles you intend to discuss in your literature review.
October 4: Small Stories
Nadia Wheatley and Donna Rawlins, My Place (1988).
Margaret Atwood, "Death by Landscape," Saturday Night (July 1989), 46-53.

October 11: Following a Research Project from Start to Finish: Nature’s Metropolis
William Cronon, dissertation prospectus.
Symposia discussions of Nature’s Metropolis in Antipode (April 1994), 113-76 and Annals of Iowa 51 (Summer 1992), 480-525.
Assignment: Working with at least one other member of the class (larger groups are fine), bring to class next week two primary documents that can serve as evidence for an argument in Nature’s Metropolis. Each person in a group should take the lead with their own search, but other members of the group should accompany and assist and discuss with each other the strategies used in these searches. Locate one of the documents using a digital search strategy to locate a primary source online; locate the other document using a search in the physical collections of the Wisconsin Historical Society. (The two documents can illustrate different arguments.)
You’re welcome to use the footnotes of the book as starting points for each search—though you’ll learn the most from this assignment if you don’t simply go find one of the documents cited by Nature’s Metropolis. Finding a similar source would be a more valuable exercise that will teach you more about how this process works.

October 18: A Class Act Called Conservation
Karl Jacoby, Ph.D. prospectus.

October 25: Workscapes
November 1: The Political Life of Forests
Jake Kosek, Understories (entire).

November 8: History in the Wild
Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac, 127-9, 137-41. (If you're using another edition, read the essays entitled "Red Legs Kicking" and "Thinking Like a Mountain").
An Act to Establish a National Wilderness Preservation System (1964). (skim)
Special issue of Environmental History critiquing “Trouble with Wilderness,” January 1996, 7-55.

November 15: Car Country: Transforming the Landscape at National Scale
(We’ll have a Skype conversation with Chris Wells from 1:30-2:00pm during class, so please come to seminar prepared with questions about the book that you’d like to discuss with him.)

November 22: Unnatural Natures
See also the Harvard Forest dioramas at http://harvardforest.fas.harvard.edu/dioramas

November 29: Reflecting on the Process of Drafting a Literature Review
We’ll devote however much time we need or want today to discussing the process of drafting a literature review today. If it turns out that we don’t need the full three hours to do this, we can begin the process of watching some of the film clips about Hurricane Katrina that we’ll discuss next week.
Assignment: Rough drafts of literature reviews are due in seminar today.
December 6: Out of the Whirlwind
Collection of web resources about Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy.
In-class viewing of film clips about Hurricane Katrina.
Assignment: Critiques of rough drafts of lit reviews due in class today.

December 13: The Future of the Environmental Past
Paul Sabin, “‘The Ultimate Environmental Dilemma’: Making a Place for Historians in the Climate Change and Energy Debates," Environmental History 15:1 (2010), 76-93.
Assignment: Final draft of literature review due in class today.