



Photo: Mark Klett, "Trails of Weekend Explorers, Near Hanksville"

**BIO 527/SOS 527**  
**Environmental Ethics & Policy Goals**  
**Spring 2022**  
**TH: 3:00-5:30pm**  
Life Sciences C-Wing (LSC) 260

Instructor: Prof. Ben A. Minteer, School of Life Sciences

Email: [Ben.minteer@asu.edu](mailto:Ben.minteer@asu.edu)

Office hours: W 3:00-4:00pm; TH 1:00-2:00pm (via Zoom; access through course Canvas site)

**Course Description**

A discussion-driven seminar on the ethical dimensions of conservation and environmental practice. We'll start the semester by surveying some of the most influential approaches in the field of environmental ethics, focusing on the debate over whether the motivation for environmental protection should appeal to human-centered or nature-centered ethical principles. We will then examine the environmental ethical thought of some of the most significant historical figures in the tradition, including Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson. From there we'll engage a

series of topics, issues, and arguments that bridge environmental ethics and conservation/environmental action, including the debate over strategies and tactics in contemporary environmentalism and conservation, valuation of species and ecosystems, the moral implications of the "Anthropocene," for nature preservation, the ethical dimensions of climate change and sustainability, and a number of other topics.

## **Seminar Themes/Core Questions**

The following questions will drive much of our discussion over the course of the semester:

- How should we value the environment? Do wild species and/or ecological systems have a "good of their own" that must be respected regardless of their instrumental value to humans?
- What is the value of the work of historical environmental thinkers such as Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson for our understanding of environmental responsibility in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
- What ethical, social, and political vision – and what tactics – should define the environmental movement in the coming decades?
- Should environmentalism as a social and political movement jettison its moralism and close association with wilderness and endangered species preservation in favor of a more "pragmatic," growth-and-technologically oriented agenda?
- Do "enlightened" anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric moral arguments lead to similar or different environmental policy agendas?
- Is there a fundamental conflict between economic/prudential environmental policy arguments and "moral" ones when it comes to valuing biodiversity and ecosystems?
- How does climate change (and global change more generally) raise significant and novel ethical and strategic concerns for conservation and environmental decision making?
- How should we balance the normative and ethical dimensions of sustainability agendas alongside more traditional preservationist values and goals?
- What ethical issues and concerns are raised the application of genetic engineering and synthetic biology technologies to the creation and conservation of animal species?
- What is the significance of the "Anthropocene" for understanding the values and goals of environmentalism, particularly regarding nature preservation?

## **Seminar Requirements**

### **1) WEEKLY READING (AND PREPARATION OF READING RESPONSES), REGULAR ATTENDANCE, AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN SEMINAR DISCUSSIONS.**

- Prepare a 1.5-2 page (single spaced) "response" to each week's readings. Responses should not just be a summary of the reading but rather a *concise analysis of/reaction to the material. The point is to demonstrate your understanding of the readings and your own reflection and critical reaction to them.* **At the end of your responses please list 3-4 questions for further discussion.** These will be useful for each week's session leader as they structure our discussion. You should cover all of the readings assigned for that week, though you may at times choose to emphasize a particular reading or two in your responses. Reading responses should be **posted to the Canvas site by 12:00 PM on Wednesdays beginning the second week of class to the discussion link included in each week's folder.**

## 2) READING DISCUSSION FACILITATIONS

- Organize and lead seminar discussion (~75 minutes) of assigned readings for a particular week during the semester. We'll develop a reading discussion schedule the first week of classes after we finalize the seminar enrollment. A *good strategy for leading the discussion is to review the reading responses and questions from your peers before running the discussion each week.* Although you aren't required to create a PowerPoint-style presentation for the facilitation, you're encouraged to do so if that helps organize your observations and discussion questions. **\*\*You do not need to submit a response piece the week that you lead discussion of the material.**

## 3) ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN THE MEDIA/CURRENT EVENTS & CONTROVERSIES PRESENTATION

- Present and lead discussion of an environmental policy, conservation, or management issue covered in the media, broadly construed (e.g., online newspaper and/or magazine articles, documentary video excerpts, TED Talks, podcasts, etc.). **\*\*Select and post the material to be discussed by 5:00 PM the Monday before class that week and send an email to the group letting everyone know the material is available (with any instructions/bullet points to consider).** You'll lead a roughly a 45-60 min. discussion of the issue, *focusing on how the material raises specific considerations of environmental ethics* (e.g., moral responsibility to nature or to future generations, values and science in environmental decision making, evaluation of environmental harms and benefits of proposed societal actions, technologies, or policies, etc.). Media discussions will take place during the second half of the seminar period when they are scheduled. [Also, note that media discussions do not – and in most cases, should not – have to match the topic of the readings for that week. The idea is to introduce additional topical or thematic material for discussion and analysis.]

## 4) SEMINAR PROJECT (PAPER & PRESENTATION)

- A semester-long research project that develops an in-depth ethical analysis of an environmental policy, conservation, design, or environmental management issue/problem. The following components:
  - Paper proposals **due 1/27** (1-2pp, incl. title, a 200-250-word synopsis that includes the *main question your paper will try to answer*, as well as the primary topics/issues you plan to engage and a preliminary reference list of 5-6 sources)
  - First drafts (~4,000-4,500 words) **due 3/31**
  - Paper presentations (last 2 weeks of the semester; ~15 minutes ea. followed by a short discussion).
  - Final papers (~4,500-5,000 words) **due 5/2** (electronic submission).

## Final Grade Distribution

- *Seminar participation* (1-3 above, i.e., attendance & overall effort, reading & media facilitations/presentations, submission of quality weekly reading responses): **50%**
- *Seminar project*: **50%** (paper proposal & final presentation 10%; first draft 15%; final draft 25%)

## Grading Scale

This is a graduate seminar, so the expectation is that you will put in the effort throughout the semester in your weekly reading responses, your reading and media presentations, and your seminar papers and final presentations. Basically, if you work hard, are consistently engaged, and produce solid work, you should do well in the course. But here's a more formal breakdown of the grading scale:

A+ = 97%-100%	B+ = 87-89%	C+ = 77-79%	E = <65%
A = 94-96%	B = 84-86%	C = 70-76%	
A- = 90-93%	B- = 80-83%	D = 65-69%	

## Academic Integrity

Academic honesty is expected of all students in all examinations, papers, laboratory work, academic transactions, and records. The possible sanctions include, but are not limited to, appropriate grade penalties, course failure (indicated on the transcript as a grade of E), course failure due to academic dishonesty (indicated on the transcript as a grade of XE), loss of registration privileges, disqualification and dismissal. For more information, see <http://provost.asu.edu/academicintegrity>.

## Reporting Title IX Violations

Title IX is a federal law that provides that no person be excluded on the basis of sex from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity. Both Title IX and university policy make clear that sexual violence and harassment based on sex is prohibited. An individual who believes they have been subjected to sexual violence or harassed on the basis of sex can seek support, including counseling and academic support, from the university. If you or someone you know has been harassed on the basis of sex or sexually assaulted, you can find information and resources at <https://sexualviolenceprevention.asu.edu/faqs>.

As a mandated reporter, I am obligated to report any information I become aware of regarding alleged acts of sexual discrimination, including sexual violence and dating violence. ASU Counseling Services, <https://eoss.asu.edu/counseling>, is available if you wish to discuss any concerns confidentially and privately.

## Readings

**BOOKS** (available in the ASU bookstore and online via Amazon, Barnes and Noble, etc. Electronic/used copies are fine):

- B. Minter and S. Pyne (eds.) *After Preservation: Saving American Nature in the Age of Humans*
- T. Nordhaus and M. Shellenberger, *Break Through: Why We Can't Leave Saving the Planet to Environmentalists*

**ARTICLES** (the articles listed on the seminar schedule below are available on the Canvas site in the "Modules" folder, organized by week. Many weeks also include elective/optional reading, which you are free to explore if you're interested in diving into a topic more deeply.)

### Seminar Topics & Schedule

#### 1: INTRODUCTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

(1/13/22) Environmental Ethics: Foundations & Fault Lines

Readings:

- B. Norton, "The Environmentalists' Dilemma"
- R. Nash, "Island Civilization: A Vision for Human Occupancy of Earth"
- B. Minter, "Environmental Ethics"

#### 2: HISTORICAL & PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS: ALDO LEOPOLD & RACHEL CARSON

(1/20/22) Aldo Leopold, Conservation, & *The Land Ethic*

Readings:

- A. Leopold, "Conservation as a Moral Issue," "Marshland Elegy," "Thinking Like a Mountain," "The Land Ethic"
- M. Nelson, "Aldo Leopold, Environmental Ethics, and The Land Ethic"
- B. Norton, "Leopold as a Practical Moralizer and Policy Analyst"

(1/27/22) Rachel Carson & the Legacy of *Silent Spring*

Readings:

- R. Carson, excerpts from *Silent Spring*
- P. Cafaro, "Rachel Carson's Environmental Ethics"
- P. Offit, "How Rachel Carson Cost Millions of People Their Lives"
- R. Conniff, "Rachel Carson's Critics Keep On, But She Told Truth About DDT"
- *AFTER PRESERVATION:*
  - J. Rappaport Clark, "Endangered Species Conservation, Then and Now"
  - A. Seidl, "Resembling the Cosmic Rhythms"

**\*Paper proposals due**

### 3: ENVIRONMENTALISM: "RADICAL," DEAD, REFORMED

#### (2/3/22) "Radical" Environmentalism: Philosophical Roots, Preservationist Imperatives

##### Readings:

- B. Taylor, "The Tributaries of Radical Environmentalism"
- A. Naess, "The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects"
- E. Abbey, "Polemic: Industrial Tourism and the National Parks," "Freedom and Wilderness, Wilderness and Freedom"
- A. Irvine, "Dear Mr. Abbey"

#### (2/10/22) The Death of Environmentalism? Revival Strategies

##### Readings:

- T. Nordhaus and M. Shellenberger, *BREAK THROUGH*: Introduction, chapters 1, 6, 9
- Breakthrough Institute, "An Ecomodernist Manifesto"
- C. Hamilton, "The Technofix is in"

#### (2/17/22) Reshaping Environmentalism, Conservation & Ecology: Race, Inclusion & the Search for Environmental Justice

##### Readings:

- *BREAK THROUGH*: chapter 3
- B. Mock, "The Green Movement Is Talking About Racism? It's About Time"
- *After Preservation*: M. Marvier and H. Wong, "Move Over Grizzly Adams-Conservation for the Rest of Us"
- C. Schell et al., "The Ecological and Evolutionary Consequences of Systemic Racism in Urban Environments"
- C. Meine, "In a Time of Social and Environmental Crisis, Aldo Leopold's Call for a 'Land Ethic' is Still Relevant"

### 4: ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL & CONSERVATION CHALLENGES

#### (2/24/22) Ethical Convergence & Divergence in Environmental Policy

##### Readings:

- B. Minter, "Unity Among Environmentalists? Debating the Values-Policy Link in Environmental Ethics" [Read only section: "Norton's Toward Unity among Environmentalists and the 'Convergence Hypothesis'"]
- H. Rolston, "Converging vs. Reconstituting Environmental Ethics"
- K. McShane, "Anthropocentrism vs. Nonanthropocentrism: Why Should We Care?"
- D. Sarewitz, "Who is Converging with Whom? An Open Letter to Professor Bryan Norton from a Policy Wonk."

#### (3/3/22) Restoration, Preservation & Conservation in a Changing World

##### Readings:

###### AFTER PRESERVATION:

- B. Minter and S. Pyne, "Writing on Stone, Writing in the Wind"
- A. Revkin, "Restoring the Nature of America"
- D. Worster, "The Higher Altruism"
- C. Meine, "A Letter to the Editors: In Defense of the Relative Wild"
- J. W. Thomas, "After Preservation—The Case of the Northern Spotted Owl"

###### BREAK THROUGH: chapter 2

(3/10/22) SPRING BREAK – \*No Seminar Meeting\*

(3/17/22) Animals, Ethics, & Conservation: A Debate

Readings:

- A. D. Wallach et al., "Summoning Compassion to Address the Challenges of Conservation"
- M.A. Oommen et al., "The Fatal Flaws of Compassionate Conservation"
- M. Bekoff, "Compassionate Conservation Isn't Seriously or Fatally Flawed"
- N. Sekar and D. Shiller, "Engage with Animal Welfare in Conservation"
  - Replies to Sekar & Shiller and response from S & S

(3/24/22) How Far *Should* We Go to Bring Back Lost Species? Re-Wilding & De-Extinction

Readings:

*PLEISTOCENE REWILDING:*

- J. Donlan et al., "Re-Wilding North America"
- *After Preservation*: H. Greene, "Pleistocene Rewilding and the Future of Biodiversity"
- D. Nogués-Bravo, "Rewilding is the New Pandora's Box in Conservation"

*DE-EXTINCTION:*

- S. Brand, "The Case for De-Extinction: Why We Should Bring Back the Woolly Mammoth"
- *After Preservation*: B. Minter, "When Extinction is a Virtue"

(3/31/22) Energy, Ethics, Justice & Climate Change

Readings:

- D. Jamieson, "Energy, Ethics, and the Transformation of Nature"
- *BREAK THROUGH*: chapters 4 & 5
- S. Gardiner, "Ethics and Climate Change: An Introduction"

**\*Seminar papers (first drafts) due**

(4/7/22) Sustainability (For & Against)

Readings:

- R. Solow, "Sustainability: An Economist's Perspective"
- B. Norton, "The Ignorance Argument: What Must We Know to be Fair to the Future?"
- J. DesJardins, "Is it Time to Jump off the Sustainability Bandwagon?"
- P. Kingsnorth, "Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist"

(4/14/22) The Anthropocene, Good & Bad/Project Presentations

Readings:

*AFTER PRESERVATION:*

- J. McNeill, "Nature and Political Power in the Anthropocene"
- E. Ellis, "Too Big for Nature"
- H. Rolston, "After Preservation? Dynamic Nature in the Anthropocene"
- E. Marris, "Humility in the Anthropocene"
- D. Foreman, "The Anthropocene and Ozymandias"

(4/21/22) Paper Presentations

(4/28/22) Paper Presentations

**\*\* Final papers due (submitted via Canvas) by 5PM on Monday, May 2nd \*\***