

History 473: Oregon Environmental History
Spring 2017, University of Oregon



John Mix Stanley, *Oregon City* (1848).

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Introduction

This course explores the dynamic field of environmental history close to home, focusing on Oregon and the Pacific Northwest. It will present and develop essential historical concepts, concerns, and methods in the context of a deep, cross-disciplinary examination of Oregon's physical, natural, and cultural landscape.

Environmental history studies the relationship between humans and their physical environments, understanding such relationships as “dialogues” between societies and the material (including the “natural” and physical) circumstances of their existence. Some environmental historians emphasize culture and intellectual themes, exploring the ways that people have understood and represented the natural world and shaped it (or disturbed it) in culturally specific ways. Others stress the essential economic foundations of environmental relationships, focusing on the need to procure subsistence, comfort, and wealth and the effects that such production has on physical and natural environments. Still others cast

attention on the politics, policy, and legal arrangement of humans' relationships with their environments, and how social and political life—situated in landscapes—is often the object of negotiation and conflict. Finally, others have seen environmental history as the study of ecology, with people considered as essential (if disturbing) elements within nature. Students will become acquainted with these various approaches and the implications of different sorts of environmental history, while situating their learning in the study of Oregon and our larger region.

Learning Objectives & Outcomes

By the end of the term, you should be able to:

- Trace the history of environmental ideas and practices in Oregon from the mid-19th century to the present.
- Explain Oregon as “landscape”—that is, as physical space that is simultaneously natural and cultural.
- Trace Oregon environmental history as a process that is culturally diverse and politically contested.
- Critically analyze and interpret “primary” historical sources, the basis for historical description, analysis, and interpretation.
- Write essays that present and develop your own argument or thesis, illustrated and supported by historical evidence.
- Assess contemporary environmental problems in terms of the past that created or shaped them.

Course Format and Requirements

This course will combine lecture with discussion, often weaving the two together to make class sessions interactive. Lectures will generally build upon—not simply recapitulate—readings. Students are responsible for completing reading and writing assignments by the time indicated on the syllabus. These written assignments will often provide the basis for class activity; students are expected to attend all class meetings and participate actively. Students must complete all assignments in order to pass the course.

Field Trips & Projects

Note also that this course is linked intricately with the others in the Oregon Abroad block (Biology 372; Geology 308/410; and Environmental Studies 375), and that work in these courses and HIST 473 will overlap—particularly the required student projects associated with ENVS 375. All students will tackle and complete a term project, which may be multidisciplinary, geological, biological, or historical. See Projects Handout. Note also that the course incorporates considerable field study. Participation in weekly field trips and the weeklong field trip to the Malheur Field Station is mandatory.

Assignments & Evaluation

Students in the course will write 5 short essays, based on the assigned readings, and keep a journal. Grades will be assigned according to the quality of these essays, the journal, and participation in class discussion.

Essays (5 @ 10% each) = 50%

Journals = 20%

Quality and regularity of participation = 30%

Essays

Essays are due in class as described in the weekly schedule below. They must directly engage the question posed and be clear, systematically organized, supported by evidence, and competently written according to the conventions of English usage and grammar. These essays are a means of thinking through and learning about weekly course material, and they will often form the basis for class discussion. Therefore, late essays cannot be accepted. Students must complete at least five essays to fulfill the requirements of the course.

Field Notebook & Journals

For Geology 308/410 and Biology 372, you will be keeping detailed field notebooks. You should add historical observations or questions to them, either mixing them in with other notations or placing them in a separate section as appropriate. Although you will be largely recording biological and geological data, consider and note the ways that the physical and natural landscapes you're encountering have been affected and transformed by human presence. The landscape itself is the product of a complicated human dialogue with nature.

Your journal is the place to translate field notes into a digested, somewhat more refined and thoughtful form. Our model might be Henry David Thoreau, who began keeping a journal in 1837 and continued the practice through 1861, filling some twenty-one journal volumes and forty-six hundred manuscript pages. For Thoreau, the journal was a sourcebook for future writings, including *Walden* (1854), a record of daily walks and reflections on natural and local history, and “a distinct work with an aesthetic integrity and unconventional life of its own,” according to William Rossi, Thoreau’s most distinguished modern editor. Thoreau called his journal, simply, “the record of . . . my affection for any aspect of the world.” It provided the “proper frame” for his “disconnected thoughts.” Thoreau understood his journal to be a unique and indispensable venue for some of his best writing. In a late January 1852 journal entry, for example, he doubted that his “thoughts written down thus in a journal might be *printed* in the same form with greater advantage.” A published work might be inferior in some ways to the journal, where his observations are “allied to life—& and are seen by the reader not to be far fetched.” If his published writing were a bouquet of picked flowers, his journal was the field where they flourished. It was debatable “whether the flower looks better in the nosegay,” he wrote, “than in the meadow where it grew—& we had to wet our feet to get it! Is the scholastic air any advantage?”

For your journals, use the same basic format as described in the Biology 372 syllabus. Use a loose-leaf notebook (to allow the addition of pages) and write with a technical drawing pen, or compile your journal in a decidedly post-Thoreauvian manner: on a computer. Using either approach will allow you to create a lasting and reliable archival format with illustrations. If you create and maintain your journal via computer, be sure to print out periodically and store an archival copy. Write in full sentences, recording relevant information, insights, and further questions. Be thorough but brief, providing concrete detail in a concise and precise manner. Try to include at least one historical insight or question about what you saw each day.

I will not collect your field notebooks, but I will closely examine your journals, which you will turn in twice during the term.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is important and academic misconduct will not be tolerated. All students will be held accountable. UO Student Conduct Code can be found at:

<http://policies.uoregon.edu/vol-3-administration-student-affairs/ch-1-conduct/student-conduct-code>

The University Student Conduct Code defines academic misconduct. Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. By way of example, students should not give or receive (or attempt to give or receive) unauthorized help on assignments or examinations without express permission from the instructor. Students should properly acknowledge and document all sources of information (e.g., quotations, paraphrases, ideas) and use only the sources and resources authorized by the instructor. If there is any question about whether an act constitutes academic misconduct, students are obliged to clarify the question with instructors before committing or attempting to commit the act. Additional information about a common form of academic misconduct, plagiarism, is available at researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism.

Required Reading

Peter G. Boag, *Environment and Experience: Settlement Culture in 19th-Century Oregon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). Out of print, but available free online from the UC Press e-book collection:

<http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft5z09p09z&brand=ucpress>

Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1995).

Nancy Langston, *Where Land & Water Meet: A Western Landscape Transformed* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2003).

Additional required readings are available online on Canvas.

Not assigned, but an important reference work is: Jeff Zicker, Kay Hummel & Bob Høgfoss, eds., *Oregon Indians: Culture, History & Current Affairs, an Atlas & Introduction* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1983).

Finally, another useful online resources is the Oregon Historical Society's Oregon History Project: <http://www.ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/index.cfm>

Weekly Reading, Lecture, and Assignment Schedule

Note: Students are required to complete all reading assignments by the date indicated on the schedule below.

Week 1 (April 3/5): Introduction: The Nature of Environmental History, Its Questions in Context / Eugene, the Willamette River, and its Millrace.

Reading: lyrics of "Oregon, My Oregon" (1920); William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 69-90; William G. Robbins, *Landscapes of Promise: The Oregon Story, 1800-1940* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 3-20, 81-108 (On Canvas); Boag, *Environment and Experience*, Part I (through 39).

Question for Consideration: Does nature have a history? What is “nature,” and how is it related to “culture”? How are both related to the physical world? Is history fundamentally *humanistic*, or can the non-human world—or even the nonorganic world—have “history”? When does Oregon history begin?

Week 2 (April 10/12): Colonialism and Ecological Revolution. Native Landscapes and Colonial Contests as Environmental History.

Readings: Boag, *Environment and Experience*, Part II (though 93); Kalapuya folktale, from Jarold Ramsey, ed., *Coyote Was Going There: Indian Literature Of The Oregon Country* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977), 89-94, 104-10; Patricia Whereat Phillips, “Tsunamis and Floods in Coos Bay Mythology,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 108:2 (Summer 2007), 181-92; Alfred W. Crosby, “Ecological Imperialism: The Overseas Migration of Western Europeans as a Biological Phenomenon,” *The Texas Quarterly* 21 (1978), 103-117 (Canvas).

Essay Question 1: Compare and contrast Native and Euro-American understandings of Oregon environments. How and why did these groups preserve, conserve, or alter these environments? Write a short essay (approximately 500-700 words, typed, double-spaced, with adequate margins) in response to these questions. *Although I do not expect poetry, I do expect clear and competent writing that adheres to grammatical convention.* Writing and content are inseparable. To paraphrase Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “The Poet,” “humans are only half themselves / the other half is their expression.” **Due in class April 12.**

Week 3 (April 17/19): Agriculture, Market Revolution, Westward Expansion.

Readings: Genesis 1: 28; short excerpts from the following: John Winthrop, “Reasons to Be Considered for Justifying the Undertakers of the Intended Plantation in New England” (1629); Robert Beverly, *The History and Present State of Virginia* (1705); *Animal Husbandry* (1775); Western Land Ordinance (1785); Northwest Ordinance (1787); Senator Thomas Hart Benton on “Manifest Destiny” (1846); Jesse S. Applegate, “Our First Winter and Summer in Oregon,” in *Many Faces: An Anthology of Oregon Autobiography*, 11-16; letter to *Oregon Statesman* (1853); letters from Chinook, Hull, and Palmer (1853), in *Talking on Paper: An Anthology of Oregon Letters and Diaries* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1994), 167-70; Homestead Act (1862) (Canvas); Boag, *Environment and Experience*, Part III (through 161).

Essay Question 2: In a short essay (500-700 words) assess the concept of “improvement.” What do we mean, conventionally and historical, when we effect “improvements” on the landscape? If Oregon pioneers viewed the Willamette Valley as Eden, then why did they seek to transform it? Consider particularly “agricultural improvements,” which are critical in asserting and maintaining land claims. **Due in class April 19.**

Journals Due Monday, April 24.

Week 4 (April 24/26): Northwest Forests

Readings: Robbins, *Landscapes of Promise*, 205-37; Timothy Egan, “The Wood Wars,” in *The Good Rain: Across Time in the Pacific Northwest* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 160-79; Larry Pynn,

Last Stand: A Journey through North America's Vanishing Ancient Rainforests (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2000), 3-42; Glen Martin, "Forest Service at age 100," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 23, 2005; Brad Knickerbocker, "Relaxed Forest Rules Revive Timber Wars," *Christian Science Monitor*, December 24, 2004 (Canvas).

Additional Resources:

Carol Hardy Vincent et al., "Federal Land Ownership: Overview and Data," Congressional Research Services, March 3, 2017, online at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42346.pdf>

Gerald W. Williams, *The USDA Forest Service: The First Century* (Washington, D.C.: USDA Forest Service Office of Communication, 2005), excerpts, online at https://www.fs.fed.us/sites/default/files/media/2015/06/The_USDA_Forest_Service_TheFirstCentury.pdf

Essay Question 3: How and why do Americans argue about forests? What have been the implications and consequences of those arguments historically? In a short essay (500-700 words) briefly address these big, fraught questions, focusing attention particularly on the forests of Oregon and the Pacific Northwest.

Due in class April 26.

Week 5 (May 1/3): Conservation, Preservation, Reclamation / Northwest Rivers and Salmon.

Readings: Richard White, *The Organic Machine*; Charles F. Wilkinson, "The Salmon People," from *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007); excerpts from the Reclamation Act (1902), the National Parks Act (1916), and the Wilderness Act (1964); Marc Reisner, "Conservation as Reclamation," excerpted from *Cadillac Desert*.

Recommended (not required) on conservation and reclamation: Robbins, *Landscapes of Promise*, 238-95; Donald J. Pisani, "Federal Reclamation and the American West in the 20th Century," *Agricultural History* 77:3 (Summer 2003), 391-419; Robert M. Wilson, *Seeking Refuge: Birds and Landscapes of the Pacific Flyway* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), vii-xii, 3-15, 90-98, 123-31, 132-36, 140-64; (Canvas).

Recommended on salmon: Joseph E. Taylor III, "Remaking Salmon," in *Making Salmon: An Environmental History of the Northwest Fisheries Crisis* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 203-36 (Canvas).

Additional Resource: *The Northwest Salmon Crisis: A Documentary History*.

Note: Begin reading Nancy Langston, *Where Land & Water Meet*. Ideally, you should finish this book before our trip to Malheur.

Questions for Consideration: What were the assumptions, goals, implications, and consequences of "reclamation" in Oregon. What was being "reclaimed," on whose behalf and to what purpose? How did/does such reclamation compare or contrast with conservationist and preservationist efforts in Oregon.

Are rivers in the Northwest today so unnatural, so altered and controlled, that they are simply machines? What about the salmon that navigate them? To paraphrase Shakespeare (*Romeo and Juliet*, II, ii, 1-2), "What's in a name? That which we call a salmon / By any other name would smell so sweet." Are salmon always salmon—is

there a fundamental difference between hatchery-produced and wild salmon? Who decides, and what are the consequences and implications?

Essay Question 4: In a brief essay (500-700 words) assess Northwest rivers and fish historically as both “natural” and “man-made.” **Due in class May 3.**

Week 6 (May 8/10): Malheur and Eastern Oregon: An Environmental History Case Study

Readings: finish reading Nancy Langston, *Where Land & Water Meet*.

Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, “Paiute Refugees from the Malheur Need a Bit of Land,”

Another Letter Never Answered by Washington, D.C.,” in *Talking on Paper: An Anthology of Oregon Letters and Diaries*, 204; letter from Ontario (1921), *ibid.*, 249-5; William O. Douglas, “Hart Mountain,” in *Varieties of Hope: An Anthology of Oregon Prose* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1993), 168-75; William Kittredge, *Owning It All* (St. Paul: Graywolf Press, 1987), excerpt (Canvas).

On the Malheur Standoff, January 2016: Kathie Durbin, “Ranchers arrested at wildlife refuge,” *High Country News*, October 3, 1994; Kirk Johnson et al., “Cautious Response to Armed Oregon Protest,” the *New York Times*, January 4, 2016; Nancy Langston, “In Oregon, Myth Mixes With Anger,” *New York Times*, January 6, 2016; Char Miller, “The complicated history of who really ‘owns’ the occupied land in Oregon,” *The Conversation* and *The Washington Post*, January 7, 2016; Peter Cashwell, “Bird-Watching, Patriotism and the Oregon Standoff,” *New York Times*, January 6, 2016; Sarah Kaplan, “Tribe to protesters occupying Oregon wildlife refuge: ‘We were here first,’” *The Washington Post*, January 7, 2016; Peter Walker, “Malheur occupation is over, but the war for America’s public land rages on.” *The Conversation*, February 19, 2016 (Canvas).

Questions for Consideration: “Whiskey’s for drinking; water’s for fighting over,” Mark Twain allegedly said. How have humans accommodated the aridity of the “Great American Desert”? How did successive human occupants of places like southeast Oregon—from Paiutes to white “pioneers” to industrial farmers and ranchers to contemporary preservationists—either adjust to the landscape or attempt to make it adjust to them? What have been the consequences? How and why has this been a source of conflict?

Can we, or how can we, manage nature? Can we avoid transforming or managing the natural world? How are these political and economic questions, not merely scientific ones? What are the lessons, potentially, of Malheur’s history, according to Nancy Langston?

Week 7 (Wednesday May 17): Eastern Oregon in Environmental-Historical Perspective: Klamath Basin Case Study

Note: No class for History 473 Monday, May 15, 2017 (other Oregon Abroad classes will meet as scheduled).

Readings: Brad Knickerbocker, “Drought and a Western Legacy of US water policies pits farmers, Native Americans, and environmentalists against one another,” *Christian Science Monitor*, May 24, 2001; Timothy Egan, “As Thousands of Salmon Die, Fight for River Erupts Again,” *New York Times*, September 28, 2002; Felicity Barringer, “Pact Would Open River, Removing Four Dams,” *New York Times*, November 14, 2008; “End to the Klamath

War,” *New York Times*, October 4, 2009; Colin Miner, “Reaching Consensus on the Klamath,” *New York Times*, January 11, 2010; William Yardley, “Tea Party Blocks Pact to Restore a West Coast River,” *New York Times*, July 18, 2012; “A Hard-Won Klamath Deal,” *Eugene Register-Guard*, March 10, 2014; “Klamath Pact Unraveling,” *Register-Guard*, December 23, 2015.

Questions for Consideration: How do the recent environmental and political controversies at Malheur and in the Klamath Basin represent, in microcosm, the legacies and dilemmas of Oregon environmental policy and history over the last 100 years? What can these controversies tell us about Native life, dispossession, and resurgence? About the myth and history of westward expansion and the American family farm? About the nature of conservation, reclamation, and agricultural development and degradation? About the battles over water and the West? About the destruction of habitat, the threats to endangered species, and controversial efforts to preserve them? About the politics of environmental regulation, modern environmental politics, and the reactionary “Sage Brush Rebellion”? About the possibility of restoration—of natural landscapes and sustainable, peaceful social life?

Essay Question 5: Write a short essay (500-700 words) in response to the big question above, focusing particular attention on one aspect of it (e.g., Native experience, reclamation, wildlife management, water policy, environmental politics).

Due in class May 17.

Week 8 (May 22/24): Aesthetics and Ideology; Nature, Nationalism, Regionalism.

Readings: Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 44-83, 122-40; Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy*, 57-111; short excerpts/images from John James Audubon, Thomas Cole, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir; Sharon M. Howe, Photography and the Making of Crater Lake National Park, *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 103:11 (Spring 2002), 76-97; Conde McCullough and the bridges of the Oregon Coast (Canvas).

Questions for Consideration: How does the landscape change historically—not merely through environmental alteration, but through the cultural and historical alteration of human aesthetics and experience? How and why, for example, did assessments of wilderness change, from “hideous and howling” (according to the Puritan William Bradford) to “the preservation of the world” (in Thoreau’s words)? How did the growth of leisure transform the way people understood, experienced, and treated particular landscapes—for example, woods, beaches, parks?

Memorial Day Holiday, Monday May 29.

Week 9 (Wednesday, May 31): Nature/Culture and Northwest Urban Environments.

Reading: Rachel Carson, excerpt from *Silent Spring* (1962); William G. Robbins, *Landscapes of Conflict: The Oregon Story, 1940-2000* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 248-329; Scott Timberg, “The Novel That Predicted Portland,” *The New York Times*, December 14, 2008; Matthew Klinge, “Masses of Self-Centered People: Salmon and the Limits of Ecotopia in Emerald City,” *Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle* (2007), 230-64.

Questions for Consideration: What are the connections between cities and surrounding suburban, rural, or wilderness areas? How natural or unnatural are cities, and how natural or artificial are suburban and rural hinterlands? How would one assess the environmental history of Eugene? What can we do to make cities and towns more diverse and ecologically sustainable? Can we make them less of an impediment to species needing to change in distribution as a result of climate change? What kind of a world do we want to live in 40 years from now and 200 years from now?

Week 10 (June 5/7): Class Presentations

Journals due Friday, June 9.