This course is an introduction to the major American works of environmental thought and the history of American ideas about nature. I hope to place these ideas in the context of broader intellectual movements, so we'll give attention to the agrarian tradition, Romanticism, the rise of modern science, Progressivism, and post-war flowering of environmental consciousness. Important themes include: autonomy and individualism; labor and leisure; the stewardship ethic; nature as an economic, moral, spiritual and political resource; gender issues; and many others too numerous to mention. By the end of the course you should be able to read, think, discuss and write about the relationship between humans and nature in an intelligent and sophisticated way.

Course requirements:

This is primarily a discussion course. Students are expected to do the reading before class and come prepared to participate in discussion in a lively and thoughtful manner.

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

Paper #1: 20%
Paper #2: 40%
Paper #3: 20%
Participation: 20%

Rewrite policy:

Paper #1 may be rewritten as often as you like, for a new grade, until the deadline (class 17).

Paper #2: You may turn in as many drafts of this paper as you like before class 24, but you must turn in at least one draft by class 24. I will only grade the final draft.

Paper #3: There's no time for you to rewrite this one, but I would be happy to look at and comment on early drafts.

- All assignments must be turned in on the day they are due. No late papers, please!

Books:

Taylor, Arator
Crevecoeur, Letters from an American Farmer
Thoreau, Walden
Muir, Story of My Boyhood and Youth
Carson, Silent Spring
Abbey, Desert Solitaire
Silko, Ceremony
*Other readings are on reserve [R]

Paper Assignments

PLEASE NOTE: You are not expected to do any outside research for these papers. You may choose to do some additional research so for the second (long) paper, but it is not expected or required, and your primary focus
should be on the material we’ve covered in class.

YOUR MISSION: The reason we write about these texts is to help less experienced or more confused students of environmental thought; your paper should provide guidance and insight in the texts and the theoretical issues they raise. That means you are not simply reporting your opinion or letting me know you read the texts. You need to engage your reader, educate your reader, and persuade your reader that your interpretation is correct (which means anticipating the reader’s objections to your argument and responding to them).

PAPER #1: Agrarianism posits a close relationship between our patterns of interaction with nature and our political values and institutions. Drawing on Taylor, Crevecoeur, and Thoreau, explain that relationship (or relationships). This paper, like all good essays, should have a clearly-stated thesis and should be supported with quotes and examples from the text. Please do not exceed 5 pages in length (double-spaced, 12-point font).

PAPER #2: Choose one of the following questions to write on. Papers should be no more than 7-9 pages in length, double-spaced (12-pt font). Note: These questions are rather broad; you’ll want to come up with a narrower, more manageable focus when you write your paper.

A good paper has a thesis and an argument; it is well-organized and well-supported with quotes and examples from the texts. It should engage both the texts and the main themes of the course. (In other words, show me you did the reading and came to class!) Please choose your topics so that your papers cover a significant proportion of the assigned texts.

1. Judging from these writers, what do Americans think about the proper relationship(s) between humans and nature? In thinking through this question, be sure to consider the many facets of this relationship: nature as a material, spiritual, moral, political resource; nature as an obstacle to be overcome; nature as a teacher; and so on.
2. To what extent does American environmental thought offer a political philosophy? What insights do environmentalists offer on the role of government, the duties of citizenship and the problems of political action?
3. Is American environmental thought characterized by its strong individualism, or is the story more complicated than that? Support your position by analyzing the readings you consider particularly insightful on this point.
4. Is preservationism a coherent and viable philosophy? Explain and critique preservationism, drawing contrasts where appropriate with conservationism. Which position do you endorse or are they both flawed?
5. Consider the role of science and scientists in American environmentalism. Has science been on the whole a positive or negative influence on environmental thought or both, or neither? What is the relationship, historically and/or philosophically, between science and environmentalism?
6. Historian Robert Gottlieb has said that after the 1960’s, "the question of Nature could no longer be separated from the question of society itself." To what extent is this a change from pre-WWII environmentalism? Is modern environmentalism more of a continuation of or a departure from early environmentalism?
7. Environmentalism encompasses a range of values, many of which can conflict: ecological integrity, animal welfare, aesthetics, spirituality, individual autonomy, rational resource use, to name only a few. Explore the relationships among these values in American environmental thought. You may choose to look at only a few, or even two (beauty vs. rationality, ecological integrity vs. autonomy, etc). But please explore their relationship in depth, considering how they have conflicted and how they have been made compatible.

PAPER #3: Most of the texts we’ve read in this class have been written from the point of view of middle-class white men and women. Please consider how this perspective may affect the environmental philosophy of the writers. There are many possible approaches to this problem. You might want to reflect on and critically evaluate the images of Native Americans in these texts, or examine how they deploy race or gender categories (masculinity or femininity). Similarly, you might want to consider how environmental thought would look if we thought about it as an issue of social justice.
This paper should be no more than 5 pages in length (double-spaced, 12-point font). As always, I will look for a well-supported and well-argued thesis.

MYSTERIES OF GRADING REVEALED!!!
HOW I EVALUATE PAPERS

Your papers will receive numerous comments, corrections and suggestions. All of these comments should be taken as suggestions rather than instructions. However, even if my comment doesn’t make any sense at all, you should take the mere fact that I commented as a strong indication that something about that sentence or passage is creating problems for the reader. If you don’t change anything, I’ll feel ignored and start to wonder what I’m doing with my life. You can always talk to me about what’s wrong, but you should also make use of the Write Place and other resources for writing on campus.

Your paper will also receive a letter grade. You should interpret these grades as follows:

D = wholly inadequate. The paper looks like a casual effort by someone who hasn’t taken the class.

C = partially adequate. The writer achieved some of the objectives of the assignment, but the work has some major deficiencies. These deficiencies may include the failure to summarize an author’s position accurately, the failure to state a thesis, serious organizational problems or particularly poor writing.

B = nearly adequate. The writer satisfied the objective of the assignment, but some problems (in the prose, structure or content) still need to be addressed.

A = satisfactory. The writer develops the paper with assurance and elegance. No obvious development in the argument or improvements in the quality of writing are needed.

Plusses and minuses are based on more subtle distinctions in quality. These distinctions derive from such considerations as the quality of the writing, the originality and sophistication of the argument, and how well the text is used to support the argument.

Pet peeves:

- Failure to use specific, concrete language. I particularly object to the verb "feel." I’m sure these authors were passionate people, but I don’t care what they feel. I care what they argued, contended, asserted, etc.
- Long introductions generously padded with clichés (like: "Since the beginning of time, people have debated the question of justice.")
- Confusion over block quotes: the rule is to set the quote off from the text when it is over 50 words, and do not use quotation marks.
- Confusion over punctuating embedded quotes: You should use a comma before you quote a whole sentence (e.g. Locke states, "The natural liberty of man is to be free from a superior power.") But you should not use a comma when the quote simply continues the sentence (e.g. Locke’s "natural liberty" is different from Rousseau’s.) And never begin a quote with an ellipse: "...the warre of every man against every man" is wrong; it should be "the warre of every man against every man."
- Paragraphs that don’t have a topic sentence, or have more than one topic.
- The words "within" and "exist." "In" and "is" are perfectly good words; use them.

Some notes on thesis statements:

A thesis statement tells the reader what you will argue. It does not merely tell the reader what the essay is about. In academic writing, you should not keep the reader guessing what your argument is. The first paragraph should include a clearly stated position that the rest of the essay will support. A strong thesis ties the essay together; it provides a structure.

In addition, the thesis should be interesting. That is, it should be a point that isn’t self-evident or that takes a side in an on-going controversy. A good approach is to set up a puzzle in the introductory paragraph -- something confusing about the texts that you can explain.

I. Introduction

Class 1: Lecture: The Development of Environmental Consciousness

Class 2: Lecture: The American Wilderness and the Agrarian Tradition

II. Agrarian Traditions

Class 3: John Taylor, Arator, Author’s Preface, #2, #3, #12, #13, #15, #29, #58, #59, #60

Class 4: Crevecoeur, I, II, III, VII
Class 5: Crevecoeur, IX, XI, XII

III. Romanticism

Class 6: Thoreau, Walden, "Economy"
Class 7: Thoreau, thru "The Ponds"
Class 8: Thoreau, thru "Spring"

*paper #1 due, in class

IV. The New Science of Nature

Class 9: Lecture: The rise of modern science
Class 10: Marsh, Man and Nature [R]:

 Preface, pp. 18-20 (Geographical Influence of Man),
 29-46 (stability of nature physical improvement),
 114-120 (habitable earth first removal),
 186-187 (general consequences),
 194-200 (influence of forests),
 250-253 (utility of the forest),
 279-280 (instability of American life)

V. Man (and Woman?) and Wilderness

Class 11: Muir, Ch. 1-3
Class 12: Muir, Ch. 4-6
Class 13: Muir, Ch. 7-8

Jewett, The White Heron [R]

VI. Conservation and Preservation

Class 14: Lecture: The rise of conservationism
Class 15: Pinchot, Fight for Conservation, ch. 1, 4, 6, 9 [R]

 Bailey, The Country-Life Movement [R]:
 pp. 14-30 (some interrelations),
 55-60 (what is to be the outcome),
 85-96 (woman's contribution),
 178-200 (country-life phase)
Class 16: Lecture: Urban Environmental Reform

**VII. Modern Environmentalism**

Class 17: Leopold, A Sand County Almanac, "The Land Ethic" [R]

*final rewrite of paper #1 due, in class

Class 18: Carson, Ch. 1-6

Class 19: Carson, Ch. 11-17

Class 20: Abbey, pp. 1-92 (through "Rocks")

Class 21: Abbey, pp. 93-220 (through "Down the River")


  Berry, A Few Words in Favor of Edward Abbey [R]

Class 23: Berry, Getting Along With Nature [R]

Class 24: Berry, An Agricultural Crisis [R]

*Draft of paper #2 due, in class

Class 25: Silko, pp. 1-81

  Waller, "Friendly Fire: When Environmentalists Dehumanize American Indians" [R]

Class 26: Silko, pp. 81-168

Class 27: Silko, pp. 169-end

Class 28: Conclusion

*paper #3 due, in class

Final draft of Paper #2 due: Monday June 10, at 9:00 AM