

U.S ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS

Political Science 329.

Fall Quarter, 2008

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Syllabus

The closely related and compelling policy issues of global climate change and the worldwide biodiversity crisis, are the most important political and scientific problems of this century. These global problems are paralleled and strongly influenced by struggles within the United States over the management and protection of domestic natural resources and environmental values. The domestic American political struggles are central to the global struggles, not only because the lands and resources of the United States are so valuable, but also because, for better or worse, the US policy system for managing and supporting our natural resources are a type of model for the rest of the world. Our laws (NEPA and the Endangered Species Act, for obvious examples) become the basis for actions across the globe. So domestic political conflict over protecting and restoring natural systems are central to global struggles over nature. There should be no question about the importance of understanding U.S. environmental politics for the future of not only the US, but also the entire globe.

The goal in this course is to develop and share substantive knowledge about U.S. environmental and natural resources policy making, as well as provide some theoretical orientation that will order thinking about environmental policy issues. The primary theoretical orientation that will be used is interest group theory, which is a loose and often inconsistent set of concepts and ideas, rather than a coherent package. But interest group theory, rooted in the assumptions of American pluralist thought, and with many limitations, is a very useful taxonomy (at least) for examining the realities of American policy concerning natural resources and the human environment. We will consider, among other things, whether ongoing changes in American social structure, particularly in the participation of Americans in voluntary action, are changing the patterns of interest group struggles over environmental issues. We will also consider the

ways in which an environmental movement can survive and succeed in a time, such as the present, when environmental organizations have been systematically denied access to the formal mechanisms of power in Washington.

The primary focus of attention in the class will be upon natural resources and environmental policy as made and implemented by administrative agencies (bureaucracies), rather than by legislative or judicial bodies. But no easy separation of powers can be made among the branches of government when considering environmental policy. The basic framework we will use will be to consider legislation and court edicts as setting the parameters within which administrative decision-makers and interest groups operate and interact.

It is analytically useful to think of the domestic environmental policy system in the United States as being composed of two rather distinct sub-systems. One is involved in contests over natural resources—land, forests, water, fish and wildlife, and so on. Issues within this political sub-system typically concern such matters as protecting biological diversity, endangered species, wilderness, and so on. This sub-system can be called the “Interior” or “natural resources” political sub-system. The federal land managing and water resource agencies are the central political institutions. Administratively this sub-system more or less peaks in the cabinet level Department of Interior, although it is a complicated situation. Usually the cabinet Secretary of Interior is the leading official actor in this Interior or natural resources political sub-system.

The other political sub-system can be labeled “environmental quality”. It peaks (more or less) in the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The primary focus within this latter system is the management and control of the residuals of urban-industrial life. So the policy issues processed through the environmental quality sub-system concern air and water pollution, toxic wastes, hazardous materials, and the like. The political processes, issues, and institutional actors in these two sub-systems are usually quite different from each other. Indeed for most domestic purposes, anyway, these are different issue arenas, although are often lumped together.

This distinction between political subsystems is often unrecognized, but is quite important. At some level of abstraction, of course, these two issue arenas converge—say for some aspects of global climate change, and for some issues over energy and the environment. But for most purposes they are very distinct. In this course we will consider the political process in both sub-systems, and how they relate. But the primary course focus will be on the Interior or natural resources political sub-system.

Besides considering the political processes in play, we should simultaneously learn a good bit about substantive policy issues dealing with land, wildlife, forests, fisheries, water, and climate. Serious attention will also be directed to the

ways in which the intersection of energy policy and environmental protection demands shape and are shaped by the political process.

The two pieces of national legislation that will anchor and orient the class will be the National Environmental Policy Act, universally called NEPA, and the Endangered Species Act, often shortened into the ESA. So it will be incumbent upon students to develop a substantial and nuanced understanding of these two Acts, and the technical language that envelops them (e.g., the differences between an Environmental Impact Statement and an Environmental Assessment or the differences between a threatened and endangered species). Mistakes on these types of things on an exam or paper will certainly be noted.

This critical election year, playing out during fall quarter, seems bound to lead to “change” to some of the processes and policies dealing with the environment, notably concerning energy and the environment and climate. So we will use the election as the backdrop to consider the adequacy of our existing institutions for resolving environmental conflicts in ways that sustain a livable country and world-for us and all the other critters. The legal/political structure dealing with the environment has built up, incrementally, ever since American independence. But many critical environmental institutions and policies have a lifespan of “only” 35-40 years. Since then our world and country have changed. We need to consider whether such institutions as NEPA and the Endangered Species Act are still appropriate ways to maintain livability.

Lectures and class discussions will introduce materials and ideas that are not available in the readings, so regular attendance and participation will be required. We will make use of much case material in the course. The responsibilities of the course will include active participation in discussion section. The discussion section will be primarily devoted to discussing and critiquing the books, and also working upon structuring the research paper.

For the research paper students will prepare a case study of a significant U.S. environmental and natural resources policy issue or dispute, relying, for the most part, on primary source material. Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) concerning major projects or proposals are the appropriate source of primary information for the paper. EISs provide critical lenses for examining environmental policy processes. The Northwestern University library provides the class some unique opportunities to work with such primary source materials. Both a midterm and a final exam are anticipated. The midterm is not yet scheduled. The paper is due on Tuesday, December 2, during the period the class is scheduled to meet. The final exam, which is on Monday December 8 is cumulative in its coverage. The final grade for the course will be based on the midterm exam (20%), the final exam (35%), the discussion section requirements (10%), and the paper (35%). Please note the relatively high percent of the grade based on the paper.

As you look at the course outline, you will note that the readings for the course are front-loaded. They are not necessarily matched with what will be discussed in the lectures. The reason that the reading is heavily weighed in the first part of the course, with only fairly modest reading in the last couple of weeks, is because students should be deeply engaged with their papers by then. Given the high percent of the grade derived from the paper it is worth noting that the paper should be unmistakably informed by the books you will have read and the class material which will have been discussed.

There may be a couple of ungraded (but required) modest exercises to give you some hands on experiences using federal government resources. You will be encouraged to use supplemental sources throughout the course. So, for example, the first book students should be reading is one of the two books about wolf reintroduction in the Yellowstone ecosystem. Students are also expected to search Ralph Maughan's wolf home page and blog to update the story of wolf reintroduction, and other web resources on wolf recovery in the Yellowstone area. . Doing so is "required" in that class discussions will presume you have read the updates.
Later books will also need updating.

REQUIRED READINGS:

(1)One of:

Thomas McNamee, THE RETURN OF THE WOLF TO YELLOWSTONE, or
Douglas W. Smith and Gary Ferguson, DECADE OF THE WOLF: RETURNING
THE WILD TO YELLOWSTONE.

(2) Steven Yaffee, THE WISDOM OF THE SPOTTED OWL

(3) John N. Maclean, FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN: THE TRUE STORY OF THE
SOUTH CANYON FIRE

(4) Charles Bowden, KILLING THE HIDDEN WATERS

(5)Charles Wohlforth, THE WHALE AND THE SUPERCOMPUTER

COURSE OUTLINE

I. Introduction: The Human Environment as a Policy Problem. How Global warming and the losses to global biodiversity play out within the domestic politics of the United States.

McNamee, THE RETURN OF THE WOLF TO YELLOWSTONE or Douglas W. Smith and Gary Ferguson, DECADE OF THE WOLF: RETURNING THE WILD TO YELLOWSTONE.

II. The Institutional Actors: A Complex Web of Natural Resource Agencies. The Policy Biases of Formal Organizations.

Yaffee, THE WISDOM OF THE SPOTTED OWL, first half

III. The "Environmental Movement" and Environmental Groups as Interest Groups in the Domestic Policy Arena

Yaffee, THE WISDOM OF THE SPOTTED OWL, second half

IV. Interest Group Theory: Taxonomy for Environmental Policy Analysis.

Publius, (Madison), FEDERALIST #10-a handout

John N. MacLean, FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN: THE TRUE STORY OF THE SOUTH CANYON FIRE

V. Pluralism, Complexity and the American Political System: Uneven Consequences for Environmental Policy.

Bowden, KILLING THE HIDDEN WATERS

VI. Environmental Issues and Administrative Agencies: Interagency Conflict as Interest Group Struggle.

VII NEPA: A Constitution-like Legislative Action.

VIII. Scientific Uncertainty and Policy-making.

Wohlforth, THE WHALE AND THE SUPERCOMPUTER

IX. Alternative Avenues to Shape Environmental Policy: The State and Local Options.

News stories and web resources about state global warming initiatives, and about efforts of Chicago Wilderness.

X. American Environmental Policy and the Global System

This course organization is built around a theoretical framework, essentially interest group theory. But we will simultaneously be moving from a beginning focus upon managing lands, on to wildlife, to forests, to fisheries and marine resources, to energy, to water, and finally to climate. The interweaving of broader theoretical concern with a significant overview of a series of critical policy arenas and disputes is difficult. We will try to make the shift from one issue area to another in both cumulative and, hopefully, seamless.