

NRSM 570: Graduate Seminar in Political Ecology

T/Thu 9:30-10:50, NAC 202

Instructor information

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Office hours: by appointment on T/TH 1-3 pm

Course description:

Political ecology is a field of study for understanding social and environmental change, problems and solutions. The introduction to a recently edited volume on political ecology (Perreault et al., 2015, 7-8) states that political ecology is distinguished from other “social-environmental” approaches by three key commitments. The first is to a **theoretical commitment** to critical social theory and a post-positivist understanding of nature and the production of knowledge about it, which views these as inseparable from social relations of power. The second is to a **methodological commitment** to in-depth understandings entailing both constructivist and material dimensions of reality, and as such, to using mixed qualitative and quantitative methods in place-based, historically situated analyses (i.e., to reveal “chains of explanation” involving “bottoms up” considerations of broader, non-place based social and environmental forces). And third, to a **political commitment** to social justice and structural political transformation (i.e., change of economic, political and institutional systems) to better support historically marginalized peoples and places.

While seeking to understand (let alone change!) the many forces operating in and on a social-ecological system is a daunting task, it is particularly challenging to do so through being attuned to the intersecting ways power and politics operate and influence material and ideational dimensions of nature/ecology/natural resources. It can be particularly difficult for those new to social science theory, especially to political economy of development/agrarian change and Marxian theory that are foundational to political ecology. This task is further confounded by the dynamic and increasingly far reaching net of topics political ecologists are addressing over the years. For example, while early political ecologists tended to work in the “developing” world documenting the struggles, interests and plights of marginalized populations and places (typically against predatory colonial and independent states and elites) over the years they have applied their approach across industrialized countries in the north and to new and different sets of actors, structures and policies influencing the politics of socio-environmental change around the world. These include the neoliberalizations of global corporate capitalist economies, and their socio-ecological impacts on land and natural resources, food and agricultural systems, conservation, and views of nature itself, and these further affect efforts to foster progressive collective action including those spearheaded by local and community-based coalitions. Of key importance today are considerations how political ecologists approach “adaptation” to climate change in different places, and how they interpret and plan movement politics regarding “the people” given the rise of what has been called “authoritarian populism” – ascendancy of far right politics among working people? These questions demand we turn our critical eyes back to some of the foundational understandings and appeals of the field itself.

Please recognize that NRSM 570 has not been organized to provide a comprehensive survey of social theories in environmental and natural resource social science, rather it focuses on those associated within the field of political ecology. Furthermore, it is not/cannot provide comprehensive coverage even of the field of political ecology itself given its literal explosion over the past decade. In this class, you will learn the origins of the field, central approaches in the political ecology “tool box,” and examples of how political ecologists approach what at least your instructor views as crucial topics and challenges of our day. A major objective of this class is for you to become sufficiently familiar with the field and its tools for you to effectively use them to critically examine social and environmental subjects, transitions and practical challenges – and especially those related to your own graduate thesis or dissertation.

Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete this course will:

- Understand significant moments in the history, evolution, and contemporary concerns of political ecology
- Gain insight into how social- ecological systems and their transitions, challenges, problems and potential solutions are explained within the political ecology approach
- Understand major concepts and tools used by political ecologist in both international and U.S. contexts
- Build your own critical analytic skills through in-depth application of the political ecology framework to a particular topic, ideally one related to your own thesis or dissertation research
- Develop and refine critical reading and thinking skills, including writing skills.

Prerequisites:

Only registered graduate students are permitted to enroll in this seminar. No exceptions. Background in environmental/natural resource social science is very helpful; if lacking, students are expected to take initiative to ask the instructor for further clarification in class and do independent background reading.

Seminar Format and Focus

NRSM 570 is a graduate seminar, which means that students are responsible for contributing to the content of the course through engaged participation, discussion, independent research and (final)project presentations; indeed the success of the course depends on a collective dialogue about the meaning and implications of the readings. Engaged participation refers to being thoughtful and well prepared to raise questions and interact with the class to further your own intellectual development and that of the group; it does not refer to the number of comments you make in class or your level of expertise. In class discussions, please participate by following the thread or theme of the discussion before moving to raise a new topic, and focus on queuing up (seeking to be next in line to speak). **Civility and respect for different understanding of the concepts, views and ideas are mandatory.**

Students are expected to carefully and thoroughly read *all* assigned readings prior to class and come to class prepared to discuss, examine, analyze, and critique each reading. The course is reading intensive, especially in the beginning. To assist, during the first few weeks the instructor will provide short lectures to build a common theoretical foundation among seminar participants. However, there after classes will be more student-led and discussion-oriented, facilitated by each of you preparing and sharing a reading response (see below).

Early on you are expected to identify a topic for your final paper. A midterm assignment has been designed to assist you with galvanizing information learned up to that point in the class, and how to use it to raise questions to guide your research on that topic (more on the mid-term assignment below). The final section of the course is devoted to student presentations and discussions. Students will have a ½ class period to present on the topic of your choice (the same topic for your final paper). The presentation provides you the opportunity to organize and discuss your independent research and ideally benefit from suggestions and feedback from the class and instructor before completing the final paper.

Readings

All readings except those from the two books we will read (see below) are available from UM Moodle ([Moodle Login Page](#) -- login with your username/password and go to NRSM 570). These include articles published in journals as well as book chapters.

We will be reading the following two books which I have ordered copies at the UM Book store (but feel free to buy from elsewhere – used copies may be available and less expensive).

- Cleaver, F. 2012. *Development Through Bricolage: Rethinking Institutions for Natural Resource Management*. London and NY: Routledge.
- Taylor, M. 2015. *The Political Ecology of Climate Change Adaptation: Livelihoods, Agrarian Change and its Conflicts of Development*. London and NY: Earthscan from Routledge.

Other Resources on Political Ecology

- One of the best resources is [POLLEN Political Ecology Network](#) - you can sign up here for following the network on Twitter or via Email. They have a particularly good newsletter which lists recent publications and books
- [University of Kentucky Political ecology Working Group](#)
- [The Center for Political Ecology](#)
- [Cultural and Political Ecology Specialty Group of the Association of American Geographers \(CAPE-AAG\)](#)
- [Journal of Political Ecology: Case Studies in History and Society \(JPE\)](#)

Assignments, Evaluation and Due Dates

- Class participation 10% throughout the semester
- Reading response 20% as scheduled (email to class)
- Project abstract and bibliography 5% 2/27 (email to Jill)
- Mid-term assignment 20% 3/12 (word doc, email to Jill)
- Project presentation 10% as scheduled
- Final paper 35% 5/6 (word doc, email to Jill)

Total 100%

Identifying and Committing to Your Project Topic

It is very important that you identify as early as possible (and stay committed!) to a specific topic (or question) for you to address in your midterm and final paper. The midterm is designed as a first step to thinking about how to address your topic through a political ecology approach. The topic/question should be relatively specific and well-defined, and related to environmental change, conservation, or natural resource management internationally or in the U.S. The topic may address a theoretical or methodological issue or a topic applied to a particular case study. You are encouraged to select a topic that relates to your thesis/professional paper. **You must, however, examine the topic through the lens of political ecology (even if that is not the theoretical focus** for your thesis work). All papers must involve a rigorous engagement with political ecology. Please remember that your work for this class must be new and original (i.e. you cannot turn in a chapter you have already written for your thesis or a paper written for another course but you can revise and rethink the topic in light of political ecology).

Class Participation (10%)

Regular attendance and engaged participation is expected. As noted above, “engaged participation” refers to your role in the seminar as coming to class having read the material, and prepared to discuss, ask questions and share your observations and comments; and in a civil and respectful manner.

Preparing and Sharing a Reading Response (20%)

Beginning the third week of class, each student will be responsible for preparing and sharing with the class one reading response for readings assigned to a particular class period (response should build on but not focus on readings titled “background”). These should be emailed to the instructor and all class members the night before class (or at the latest, one hour before class). The purpose of preparing reading responses is for each student to participate in illuminating key concepts and analyses in assigned readings, and facilitate class interaction suitable to a graduate seminar. The reading response should follow this format (1-2 pages, single spaced): 1) complete citation for each reading, 2) a summary of the major points of each reading including identification of key theories and terms referred to in the reading (see “background” readings for assistance); 3) an analysis of the paper’s insights into and contributions to theoretical, methodological or political debates; and 4) raise at least three further questions. Questions can address tensions or contradictions in the readings and applications, raise alternative interpretations or indicate gaps/missing pieces in the arguments.

Project Topic/Abstract (5%)

Identify the topic that you will use for your midterm and final project. Include a preliminary title, a 1- 2 paragraph description of the major topic or question you will examine, a few lines on why this topic is important, and at least 5 references relevant to the topic (you don’t have to have read already). Please do not change topics after the abstract has been submitted.

Mid-term Assignment (20%)

The midterm assignment is available on the last page of this syllabus. The purpose of the mid-term is to give you the opportunity to think and begin to apply the political ecology approach to your final project topic. It asks you to select five concepts from the political ecology “tool box” and use them to develop questions and lines of inquiry related to your chosen topic but not to provide answers in the midterm; the latter will come in your final paper. The midterm will also enable the instructor to assess individual student learning and address areas requiring further clarity up to this point in the semester.

Project Presentation (10%)

Each student is required to make a class presentation on your final paper (the topic outlined in your project abstract and explored in the midterm). Presentations offer students the opportunity to engage the class in their topic prior to writing/finalizing their final paper. Students can provide the class with a brief reading or background information prior to the presentation. During the third week of class, students will sign up for presentation dates. There will be a projector and laptop during presentations for students who wish to use this technology. If you plan to use power point, please bring your presentation on a flash drive. Presentations will be followed by seminar-like critical discussion. Presentations will be evaluated based on your ability to effectively convey key aspects of the topic and political ecology concepts involved, application of theory, original analysis, and conclusions.

Final Paper (35%)

The objective is for you to use and apply political ecology concepts and approach; it is fine to build off your midterm as in providing a much more detailed literature review and analysis. If you are new to your graduate program, my suggestion is to treat the final paper as a critical literature review on a particular topic. If you are further along in your project (e.g., you have data or have extensively reviewed the project/topic), you can offer specific findings or conclusions from a political ecological perspective. If you are trying to make a compelling case for a particular interpretation or analysis, you’ll need to provide evidence or illustration with data, history, examples, facts and figures, quotations or if no empirical data is available, through some other type of analysis and argument. **Whatever format, the paper should demonstrate a political ecological approach to your topic.**

Final papers should be 10-15 pages (including references), typed in double-spaced, 11-12 point font, and **properly referenced** (any social science style e.g., APA or ASA is acceptable as long as you follow it consistently). These formats will have you cite your sources in text (last name of the author and the year is fine, include page number if using a direct quotation) as well as in the bibliography at the end. Papers will be evaluated on their depth of understanding and application of political ecology approach and concepts, compelling analysis and insightfulness of applying political ecology to the topic, and overall quality of organization and writing.

In class discussions, please participate by following the thread or theme of the discussion before moving to raise a new topic, and queuing up (seeking to be next in line to speak).

Course Schedule

1/14 Course Introduction

Overview of course syllabus, student introductions, and background.

1/16 Origins and Concerns of Political Ecology

- Robbins, P. 2012. *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Pub. chaps. 1-2.

- Neumann, R.P. 2005. *Making Political Ecology*, chaps. 1-2

Foundational Texts:

- Blaikie, P. 1985. A New Approach – With New Problems. In *The Political Economy of Soil Erosion in Developing Countries*. Longman Science and Technology

- Blaikie, P. and H. Brookfield. 1987. Approaches to the study of land degradation. In: *Land Degradation and Society*. New York: Methuen Press

1/21 Key Theories and Concepts in Political Ecology

- Robbins, P. 2012. *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Pub. Chaps. 3-4.

- Neumann, R.P. 2005. *Making Political Ecology*, chap 3.

Other recommended readings

- To see where political ecology fits within conservation social sciences review the following:

Download: [Roth Reading Web Page](#) (see Roth, p50-55, on political ecology).

1/23 Power, Politics and Social Change

- Wisner, B. 2015. Speaking truth to power: a personal account of activist political ecology. In: Perreault, T., Bridge, G., and McCarthy, J. 2015. *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*. Oxon and N.Y., Routledge. Chap 3, 53-63.

- Kepe, T, J.Bissonnette, and D.J. Roberts. 2008. Why are students attracted to political ecology?

Environment and Planning A. 40: 2 - 254.

1/28 Colonialism and Struggles Over Material Resources and Meanings

- Moore, D.S. 1993. Contesting Terrain in Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands: Political Ecology, Ethnography, and Peasant Resource Struggles. *Economic Geography* 64: 380-401.

- Neumann, R.P. 2003. The Production of Nature: Colonial Recasting of the African Landscape in Serengeti National Park. In *Political Ecology: An Integrative Approach to Geography and Environment- Development Studies*. K.S. Zimmerer and T.J. Bassett (eds.). New York: The Guilford Press. Pgs. 240-255.

1/30 Case Study on Kenya: In-class video “The Vision of Matthai Wangari”

2/4 The Power of Discourse

- Leach, M. and J. Fairhead. 2000. Fashioned Forest Pasts, Occluded Histories? International Environmental Analysis in Western African locales. *Development and Change* 31: 35-59.
- Leipold, S. Peter H. Feindt, Georg Winkel & Reiner Keller. 2019. Discourse analysis of environmental policy revisited: traditions, trends, perspectives. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, 21:5, 445- 463, DOI: 10.1080/1523908X.2019.1660462

2/6 Fruitful Frictions: Politics, Science, Knowledge and Ecology

- (background) Zimmerer, K. S. 2015. Methods and environmental science in political ecology. In: Perreault et al. 2015. Chap 11, 150-168.
- Belsky, J.M. and Stephen F. Siebert. 2016. Combining political ecology and ecological disturbance theory to understand an historic forest land use and livelihood in Bhutan: Lessons for forest conservation and development. IUCN, Global Economics and Social Science Programme, Gland, Switzerland. Available from <https://www.iucn.org/theme/science-and-knowledge/our-work/culture-science-and-knowledge/social-science-conservation>.

2/11 Socio-Ecological Transformations in the U.S. West

- Sayre, N. 1999. The Cattle Boom in Southern Arizona: Towards a Critical Political Ecology, *Journal of the Southwest* 41:239-261.
- McCarthy, J.P. 2002. First World Political Ecologies: Lessons from the Wise Use movement.

Environment and Planning A 34:1281-1302.

Other recommended readings

- Walker, P.A. 2003. Reconsidering 'Regional Political Ecologies: Toward a Political Ecology of the Rural American West. *Progress in Human Geography* 21(1):7-24.

2/13 Property as Social Process and Relationships

- (Background) Vandergeest, P. 1997. Rethinking property. *Common Property Resource Digest*. 41, p.4-6.
- Beitzl, C.M. 2012. Shifting policies, access and the tragedy of enclosures in Ecuadorian mangrove fisheries: towards a political ecology of the commons. *Journal of Political Ecology* 19: 94-113.
- Yung, L. and J.M. Belsky. Private Property Rights and Community Goods: Negotiating Landowner Cooperation Amidst Changing Ownership on the Rocky Mountain Front. *Society & Natural Resources* 20: 689-703.

2/18 Gender and Feminist Political Ecology

- (background) Elmhurst, R. 2015. Feminist Political Ecology In: Perreault et al 2015, Chap 40: 519-530.
- Schroeder, R. 1997. Re-claiming land in The Gambia: Gendered Property Rights and Environmental Intervention. *Annals of the Assoc. of Amer. Geographers*. 87: 487-508.
- Watch “Gender in Coffee,” a documentary (1 hour) <https://www.genderincoffee.com/watch-1>

Other recommended readings:

- Fletcher, Amber J. 2018. "More than Women and Men: A Framework for Gender and Intersectionality Research on Environmental Crisis and Conflict." Pp. 35–58 in *Water Security Across the Gender Divide, Water Security in a New World*, edited by C. Fröhlich, G. Gioli, R. Cremades, and

H. Myrntinen. Cham: Springer International Publishing. (Link to article).

2/20 Livelihoods

- (background) Carr, E.R. 2015 Political Ecology and Livelihoods. In: Perreault et al, 2015. Chap 25, 332- 342.
- Natcher, D.C., C.G. Hickey and S. Davies. 2004. The Political Ecology of Yukon Forestry: Managing the Forest as if People Mattered. *International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology* 11 : 343-355.
- Marschke, M and F. Berkes. 2006. Exploring strategies that build livelihood resilience: a case from Cambodia. *Ecology and Society* 11: 42.

2/25 Markets, Commodities and Neoliberalization of Nature

- (background) Bakker, K. 2015 Neoliberalization of nature. In: Perreault et al, 2015. Chap 34, 446-456.
- Tsing, A. 2008. Contingent Commodities: Mobilizing Labor in and beyond Southeast Asian Forests. In *Taking Southeast Asia to Market: Commodities, Nature and People in the Neoliberal Age*. Nevins, J. and N. L. Peluso (eds). Cornell University Press. p. 27-42.
- Kull, C.A., X.A de Sartre, M. Castro-Larranaga. 2015. The political ecology of ecosystem services. *Geoforum* 61: 122-134.
- Fletcher, R. 2015. Nature is a nice place to save but I wouldn't want to live there: environmental education and the ecotourist gaze. *Environmental Education Research* 21(3): 338-350.

2/27 Environmental Governance from Above

(DUE Project abstract and bibliography; email to Jill/WORD DOC)

- (Background) Robertson, M. 2015. Environmental Governance: Political Ecology and the State. In: Perreault et al, 2015. Chap 35, 457-466.
- (Background) Valdivia 2015 Eco-Governmentality. In: Perreault et al, 2015. Chap 36, 467-480
- Li, Tania Murray. 2008. Beyond "the State" and Failed Schemes. *American Anthropologist*. 107: 383- 394.

3/3 Environmental Governance from Below:

Politics of Collaborative/Participatory Conservation in the US West

- Walker, P.A. and P.T. Hurley. 2004. Collaboration Derailed: The Politics of Community-based Resource Management in Nevada County. *Society and Natural Resources* 17:735-751.
- Belsky, J.M. and A. Barton. 2018. Constitutionality in Montana: A decade of institution building in the Blackfoot Community Conservation Area. *Human Ecology* 46(1), 79-89

3/5 Institutions for Natural Resource Management & Governance I

- Cleaver, F. 2012. *Development Through Bricolage: Rethinking Institutions for Natural Resource Management*. London and NY: Routledge. Preface-chap 3

Other recommended readings

- Cleaver, F. and J. de Koning. 2015. Furthering critical institutionalism. *International Journal of the Commons* 9: 1–18.

3/10 Institutions for Natural Resource Management & Governance II

- Cleaver, F. 2012. *Development Through Bricolage: Rethinking Institutions for Natural Resource Management*. London and NY: Routledge. chap 4-8

3/12 The Good, the Bad and Ugly of Community-Based Conservation (CBC)

DUE: Mid-Term Assignment (WORD DOC email to Jill)

- (Background) Dressler, W; Buscher, B; Schoon, M; Brockington, D; Hayes, T; Kull, C.A.; McCarthy, J.; and Shrestha, K. 2010. From hope to crisis and back again? A critical history of the global CBNRM narrative. *Environmental Conservation* 37: 5-15.
- Belsky, Jill M. 1999. Misrepresenting communities: the politics of community-based rural ecotourism in Gales Point Manatee, Belize. *Rural Sociology* 64:641-666.
- Li, Tania Muray. 2002. Engaging simplifications: community-based resource management, market processes and state agendas in upland Southeast Asia. *World Development* 30: 265-283.

Other recommended readings

- Few, R. 2001. Containment and counter-containment: planner/community relations in conservation planning. *The Geographical Journal* 167: 111–124.
- Campbell, L. M. (2007). Local conservation practice and global discourse: A political ecology of sea turtle conservation. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 97(2), 313–334.

Spring Break 3/16 - 3/20 [No classes on 3/17 & 3/19]

3/24 Climate Change and Adaptations I

- Taylor, M. 2015. *The Political Ecology of Climate Change Adaptation: Livelihoods, Agrarian Change and its Conflicts of Development*. London and NY: Earthscan from Routledge. Chaps 1,2

3/26 Climate Change and Adaptations II

- Taylor, M. 2015. *The Political Ecology of Climate Change Adaptation: Livelihoods, Agrarian Change and its Conflicts of Development*. London and NY: Earthscan from Routledge. Chaps 3,4,5

3/31 Climate Change and Adaptations III

- Taylor, M. 2015. *The Political Ecology of Climate Change Adaptation: Livelihoods, Agrarian Change and its Conflicts of Development*. London and NY: Earthscan from Routledge. Chaps 6,7,8, Conclusion

Other recommended readings:

- Wyborn, C., L. Yung, D. Murphy and D.R. Williams. 2015. Situating adaptation: how governance challenges and perceptions of uncertainty influence adaptation in the Rocky Mountains. *Reg. Environmental Change* 15: 669-682.

4/2 Socio-Ecological Politics and Practices in the New Authoritarian Era

- James McCarthy (2019) Authoritarianism, Populism, and the Environment:

Comparative Experiences, Insights, and Perspectives, *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 109:2, 301-313, DOI: 10.1080/24694452.2018.1554393

- Neimark, B, Childs, J, Nightingale, A.J, Cavanagh, C.J, Sullivan, S, Benjaminsen, T.A, Batterbury, S, Koot, S and Harcourt, W. 2019. Speaking Power to "Post-Truth": Critical Political Ecology and the New Authoritarianism *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*' [DOI](#)

4/7 Towards Transformational Change

- Scones, I. Care or control? 2018. Four challenges for transformations to sustainability. Downloaded from <https://steps-centre.org/blog/care-or-control-four-challenges-for-transformations-to-sustainability/>
- Scones, I., Stirling, A., Abrol, D., Atela, J., Charli-Joseph, L., Eakin, H., Ely, A., Olsson, P., Pereira, L., Priya, R., van Zwanenberg, P. and Yang, L. 2018. Transformations to Sustainability, STEPS Working Paper 104, Brighton: STEPS Centre

Other recommended readings:

- STEPS Centre Symposium "The Politics of Uncertainty: Practical Challenges for Transformative Action, 3-5 July 2019) <https://steps-centre.org/event/the-politics-of-uncertainty-practical-challenges-for-transformative-action/>
- Nightingale, A. et. Al. 2019. Beyond technical fixes: climate solutions and the great derangement. *Climate and Development*, <https://steps-centre.org/publication/beyond-technical-fixes-climate-solutions-and-the-great-derangement/>

Student Presentations

4/9	Student Presentations
4/14	Student Presentations
4/16	Student Presentations
4/21	Student Presentations
4/23	Student Presentations
4/28	Student Presentations
4/30	Student Presentations

Final Papers due before or on Wednesday, May 6. Please email final papers to jill.belsky@umontana.edu. Please keep as a word doc so I can use track changes/provide comments on the paper.

Your final paper with comments and final grade will be emailed to you ~ May 13.

Have a great summer.