



Sample Course Syllabus

Course Syllabus

Ecological Policy - FW 620 (3 credits)

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Professor of Fisheries (Courtesy)
Professor of Political Science (Adjunct)

Course Content:

Emphasis is on current and controversial North American ecological policy issues. Primary focus is exploring the role of scientists, technocrats, elected and appointed officials, the public, and interest/advocacy groups in ecological policy analysis and implementation. Specific policy issues considered are: (1) wildfire on public lands; (2) sustaining wild salmon runs; (3) use of genetically modified organisms; (4) at-risk species and the Endangered Species Act; (5) competing demands for scarce water supplies; (6) multiple use conflicts on public lands; (7) managing large predatory wildlife, especially wolves and cougars; (8) human-caused climate change; (9) rights, ethics, and moral imperatives relative to ecological policy; and (10) the interface between science, policy analysis, and the political process.

Target Audience:

Graduate students in natural resources, environmental sciences, ecological sciences, natural resource and ecological economics, civil engineering, marine resource management, political science, environmental ethics, and others with a background and interest in ecological policy, environmental protection, and natural resource management issues.

Prerequisites:

This is a graduate level class. Students are expected to have an academic background and current understanding of natural resources, environmental science, ecological sciences, natural resource economics, ecological economics, marine resource management, geosciences, political science, or similar disciplines, or have the consent of the professor.

Required Reading and Online Participation:

A number of specified policy/science articles and “policy backgrounders” are required reading. Copies of the articles and backgrounders will be available online through Blackboard. It is expected that all students will actively and regularly participate in the weekly online Blackboard Discussion Board about the topic covered that week. There is no text book for this course.

Grading:

Individual student performance will be assessed on an A-F basis and determined by grading the quality of a series of case study written critiques submitted by each student. In addition, each student is expected to substantively and regularly participate on the Blackboard Discussion Board. There are no examinations in this course.

Desired Learner Outcomes:

- *Understand the basic principles of contemporary ecological policy and ecological policy analysis (as measured by the quality of the weekly critiques of policy case studies and contributions to the Discussion Board).*
- *Understand how contemporary natural resource management and environmental protection issues are analyzed from a policy perspective (as measured by the quality of the weekly critiques of policy case studies and contributions to the Discussion Board).*
- *Understand a range of perspectives and viewpoints on how science interfaces with ecological policy analysis and decision-making (as measured by the quality of the weekly critiques of policy case studies and contributions to the Discussion Board).*

Students with Disabilities:

Accommodations are collaborative efforts between students, faculty, and Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). Students with accommodations approved through SSD are responsible for contacting the faculty member in charge of the course prior to or during the first week of the term to discuss accommodations. Students who believe they are eligible for accommodations but who have not yet obtained approval through SSD should contact SSD at Oregon State University immediately at (541) 737-4098.

Expectations for Student Conduct:

Students are expected to maintain proper academic conduct in all aspects of this class. This includes treating peers with respect and meeting the conduct expectations of Oregon State University regarding cheating or other behaviors. To review these general expectations, please visit the following Oregon State University web site:

<http://oregonstate.edu/admin/stucon/achon.htm>

This class involves considerable writing on the part of each student. Plagiarism, intentional or unintentional, is always a concern. For background information on what constitutes plagiarism, please visit the following Oregon State University web site:

<http://oregonstate.edu/admin/stucon/plaq.htm>

~~~ Course Topics ~~~

Week 1 ----- Introduction to Ecological Policy Analysis

Nine axioms or general principles about ecological policy will be presented and described in detail this week. Understanding these axioms will be essential to analyzing the case studies that will follow in Weeks 2 – 10. As you study the case studies presented in subsequent weeks, you will need to refer back to these nine axioms.

Week 2 ----- Wildfire Policy

One of the most challenging questions facing managers of public forest lands is developing a scientifically sound and publicly supported policy toward wildfire — one that meets society's goals for those lands and is based on accurate scientific information. The range of opinion is wide on what characteristics the desired policy should have, in part because many individuals and organizations have strong vested interest in the outcome. Also, laws such as the Endangered Species Act allow individuals and advocacy groups to sue Federal agencies to block or at least delay whatever wildfire policy or strategy is proposed.

Week 3 ----- Water Policy

Many regions in western North America suffer from severe and long-term water shortages, especially for high quality water. The seemingly insatiable demand for fresh water shows little sign of letting up, nor do most analysts expect much change in demand anytime soon. The so called "water wars" have already heated up this year. Court cases in the California Central Valley and the Oregon/Washington Klamath Basin are front and center on the political scene. Many ecological policy issues are driven by competition for scarce water resources. The policy dynamic surrounding conflicts over water is characterized by well organized advocacy groups,

professional advocates and their supporting scientists, and a complex, often conflicting, set of laws and public policies.

Week 4 ----- Wolf and Cougar Policy

Developing a politically acceptable policy about large predatory mammals (e.g., wolves, cougars, grizzlies) is challenging. As is true in many places, much of the Oregon public supports their presence (cougars) or their reintroduction (wolves). Conversely, many residents (especially those in rural regions) are vehemently opposed in large part because of concerns about predation on livestock, pets, and wildlife (especially deer and other important game species). The wolf/cougar policy issue is a good case study of the urban/rural divide on many natural resource issues.

Week 5 ----- Salmon Policy

Our case study this week will be salmon policy, particularly current issues in California, Oregon, Idaho, Washington, and southern British Columbia. Efforts to restore runs of salmon have been undertaken in this region since the mid to late 1800s. Billions of dollars have been spent, but without much long-term success. As many recent newspaper articles have highlighted, the plight of commercial and recreational salmon fishermen along the west coast appears grim. The ESA-listing of many populations of salmon, coupled with treaty obligations with Canada and various tribes, further complicate an already difficult policy issue.

Week 6 ----- Genetic Engineering Policy

The debate over developing a rational public policy concerning the use of genetic engineering (also called genetic modification) is mired in vitriolic arguments involving an amorphous mix of values, preferences, and scientific information. Many proponents of using the technology argue that it has been demonstrated to be low risk and is essential to providing sufficient high quality food to meet human needs, especially in developing countries. Others, however, argue that resorting to genetic engineering is unnecessary (along with being dangerous) because people should not be forced to eat food produced by unproven technology.

Week 7 ----- Owl and Logging Policy

National forests were created to attain public benefits, but what are those benefits and who should receive them? To some, the public forests ought to be managed to achieve the goals and aspirations of local (usually rural) residents which typically suggests that consumptive, economic uses (especially timber harvest and mining) ought to be encouraged. To others, the forests ought to preserve the biotic heritage of the nation and be managed more like wilderness areas or national parks with little or no commercial enterprise and strictly limited recreational activity. Owls and timber are the surrogates for these larger policy questions.

Week 8 ----- Climate Change Policy

Most of the public debate over climate change policy revolves around “facts” and “science” rather than the factors that drive the various policy positions. The implied assumption appears to be that if we all agreed on the facts of the case (i.e., the science about climate change), the appropriate policy choice would be clear and compelling. However, the distribution of costs and benefits is arguably the most important factor in settling on a specific policy choice, coupled

with a wide range of tolerance for risk. As with all ecological policy issues, the most important factor is the perception of who receives the benefits vs. who will bear the costs.

Week 9 ----- Role of Ethical and Moral Values in Ecological Policy

Ethical and moral values are difficult elements to consider in ecological policy analysis. Values go to the core of individual sense of what is important, right or wrong, or worth sacrificing for; “rational” (scientific) argument does not directly address such strongly held policy perspectives. There is nothing wrong (or right) about such policy positions; they are, in fact, the reality of most ecological policy issues. All too often policy analysis focuses entirely on what can be easily measured (the “science”) and overlooks that which is really important in policy making, ethical and moral values.

Week 10 ----- The Policy-Political Interface

How can the conscientious scientist, technocrat, or policy analyst (i.e., your task in this class) play a worthwhile role in helping resolve such issues when the political landscape is strewn with professional and bureaucratic land mines? What is the appropriate for scientists and analysts to play in this political world? The answer is found in having a clear and credible view of the proper role of science, scientists, policy analysis, and policy advocacy, along with a healthy appreciation of the political process as practiced in democratic society.

Course Evaluation:

You are encouraged to engage in the course evaluation process each term — online, of course. The evaluation form will be available toward the end of the term, and you will be sent instructions by Ecampus. You will login to “Student Online Services” to respond to the online questionnaire. The results on the form are anonymous and are not tabulated until after grades are posted.
