Overview: This course guides students in recognizing how ecological concerns are articulated and perceived in different cultural contexts. Environmentalists in the U.S. and Europe often face challenges both in convincing peoples around the world to participate in conservation projects and in recognizing local, situated (particularly indigenous) forms of caring about ecological health and social equity. Notions of “nature” are fundamentally culture-bound, entangled with concepts of personhood and agency, power and risk, and cosmological orderings of humans and nonhumans. Beginning with an explanation of culture and its dynamics, this course will survey ecological activities in a range of settings (China, Indonesia, Brazil, and Europe), providing students a comparative framework for recognizing the criteria mobilized as people assess whether or how their environments are in peril. The analytical foundation is anthropological, emphasizing biocultural perspectives and recent work in cultural ecology, but the course will encourage interdisciplinary formulations of student research projects. Some of our case-studies will draw from science and technology studies, and students will be assisted in developing proposals that tap and mobilize various forms of expertise and knowledge claims. We will also spend time considering disciplinary debates over the Anthropocene (how to understand its dimensions and consequences) and sampling the exciting new development of “multispecies ethnography” (projects that analyze nonhumans’ roles in social and political formations).

Over the course of the semester, students will research particular settings where resource management, climate science, or environmental ethics involves work of cultural translation—generally, encounters of natural scientists, governmental agents, and ecological activists with local peoples who are being impacted by conservation efforts. Students will learn to develop a commodity-chain analysis—how resources (from lumber to coffee) are harvested and circulated for markets—and to recognize the underlying ecological dynamics both impacted by and influencing various forms of consumption. They will then be introduced to the range of cultural conflicts over conservation, from local/national clashes to transnational disputes over establishing and managing cross-border preserves. We will also cover basic methods and techniques of ethnography and ethnology, so students will comprehend how they are deployed in field research. From this foundation, students will pursue projects that analyze the cultural dimensions of conservation efforts and the interactions of humans and nonhumans in such settings.

Assignments: There are 3 components to your overall evaluation in this course—class participation, memo writing, and a research paper. Class participation involves the usual, showing up prepared and actively participating in discussions during class; additionally, you will generate agenda items based on each sessions’ readings, as well as several written annotations of natural objects. The latter will be presented in class but not be graded. Over the semester, you will be assigned several memos on topics related to the course, such as climate change, the ethics
of sustainability, and the role of ethnography in studying conservation projects. These memos will addressed to hypothetical audiences (directors of NGOs, policy boards, or lab managers), explaining the basics of cultural analysis and its relevance (in various settings) to conservation issues. Memos are the most common genre in institutional settings (politics and business) yet students generally receive very little guidance in this format and how to use it effectively to convey complex ideas or analytical perspectives. I will familiarize students with the most common styles and offer direction on the challenging task of conveying critical-thinking in this highly restrictive format. The final research project will encompass various analytical components from the course directed toward a subject of your choosing. The elements of this project will include 1) a focus on a sustainability project in a country of your choice, 2) a commodity chain analysis, 3) engagement with concepts covered in the course, 4) analysis of social dynamics, 5) tapping at least one discipline and its key knowledge practices, 6) an analysis of the ethical dimensions of this sustainability project. Agenda items must be posted to Canvas 12 hours before class.

**Grading:**

Class participation (agenda items, annotations, discussion, attendance) = 30%

Memos = 30%

Final Paper = 40%

Plagiarism will not be tolerated on any writing assignment and will receive a failing grade.

**Attendance:** Being present for class is a requirement of this course. More than 3 unexcused absences will result in at least a letter-grade reduction.

**Books (required):**

_The Sixth Extinction_, Elizabeth Kolbert.
_Coyote Valley: Deep History in the High Rockies_, Thomas Andrew.
_Wildlife in the Anthropocene: Conservation after Nature_, J. Lorimer
_Emergent Ecologies_, Eben Kirksey

**Class Schedule:** (since this is a new course, all of the readings and discussion topics are subject to change).

**Week 1: Nature**


Week 2: Time.
Jan. 24: Deep History

Jan. 26: Anthropocene, part 1
Readings: Prologue and Chaps 1-3, The Sixth Extinction.
Assignment: Annotate a Natural Artifact.

Week 3: Perspective & Peril.

Feb 2: What is happening?

Week 4: Conservation
Feb 7: Memo on Climate Change discussion.
Assignment: 1st Memo due.
Readings: Chaps 3-5, Coyote Valley.

Feb 9: For whom?
Readings: Chaps 6-9 and Conclusion, Coyote Valley; and “Conservation planning and Indigenous governance in Australia’s Indigenous Protected Areas,” Godden and Stuart Cowell,

Week 5: Locating Climate Change
Feb 14: Research Day
Assignment: Identify a country of interest and particular conservation or sustainability project.

Feb 16: Discuss annotations.
Assignment: Annotate an artifact of climate change.
Readings: Chap13, The Sixth Extinction.

Week 6: Commodity Chains.
Feb 21: Coffee

Feb 23: Water & Land.
Week 7: Targeting Conservation
Feb 28: Ideals of conversation.
Assignment: Annotate a sustainable commodity.

Mar 1: Critiques of Conservation.
Readings: Chaps 5-8 & Conclusion, *Wildlife in the Anthropocene*.
Assignment: 2nd memo due, on environmental ethics.

Week 8: Hope!
Mar 7: Practices of Possibility.
Readings: Intro & Chaps 1-5, *Emergent Ecologies*.

Mar 9: Nonhuman Futures.
Readings: Intro and Chaps 6-10 & Conclusion, *Emergent Ecologies*.

BREAK

Week 9: Ethnographic Method

Mar 23: Field Research Day.

Week 10:
Mar 28: Discussion of Ethnographic Examples.
Readings: “Sustainability in the City: Ethnographic Approaches,” continued.
Assignment: 3rd memo due, on using ethnography to analyze sustainability projects.

Mar 30: Environmentality.

Week 11: Developing Research Sites.
Apr 4: Discussion of sites and projects.
Apr 6: Discussion of sites and projects.

**Week 12:** Identifying Core Knowledges.
Apr 11: Indigenous and scientific forms of knowledge.

Apr 13: Locating Conservation Expertise.

**Week 13:** Defining the Human Element.
Apr 18: Measuring Human Impacts and Needs.

Apr 20: Which Humans Count?

**Week 14:** Ethnicity and Race and Conservation.
Apr 25: Global Perspectives on Race.

Apr 27: Presentations.

**Week 15:**

May 2: Presentations.

May 4: Presentations.

Final papers due on May 4th.