

Welcome to **Political Ecology** (Geography 3801, AU 2022)

This in-person class meets **Tuesday and Thursday 11:10AM - 12:30PM in Derby Hall 1116**. It is taught by **Professor Becky Mansfield**, a faculty member in Geography.

See the course **Carmen** for all information and course materials. If you need assistance with Carmen, please contact **OSU Tech Help and Support**: <https://ocio.osu.edu/help>, 614-688-HELP (4357)

Contact information

How to contact me:

I am available via Carmen or email (mansfield.32@osu.edu), or in person. If you send a message via Carmen or email, I will try to get back to you within 24 hours on weekdays (but I'm unlikely to get back to you at all over the weekend). To talk to me in person, you can come without an appointment to my office hours—the hour right after class. Alternatively, we can make an appointment to meet at another time; to schedule an appointment, message me or talk to me before or after class.

Reasons to contact me

You can contact me for many reasons, including:

- *you have questions* about course material, assignments, or grades or you need extra time on an assignment.
- *you are having difficulties* that prevent you from engaging fully in the course, whether those are related to health (including mental health), work, family, or anything else.
- *you are excited about course material* and want to learn more, or you want to learn about opportunities beyond the course, e.g., for research, internships, careers, other courses.

Course description

This course introduces you to core concepts, methods, and applications of Political Ecology, a unique approach to describing human-environment interactions, explaining socio-ecological problems, and offering pathways to environmental and social justice. What makes Political Ecology “political” is that it insists that nature and society are always intertwined and shaped by power, defined broadly as dynamics of influence and advantage within economic systems and across multiple scales (micro to macro) and intersectional axes (class, gender, race, nationality, and so forth).

With its attention to power, intersectional axes of inequality and injustice, and sionatures, Political Ecology offers alternatives to dominant, mainstream approaches to environment and development. Because mainstream approaches are not fully attentive to multiple forms of power, they consistently misdiagnose causes of problems and propose solutions that are not only misguided, but often exacerbate both ecological degradation and social inequity.

Political Ecology offers robust alternative ways of thinking about environmental change, governance, and both human and planetary health and well-being—in short, alternative approaches to sustainability. These perspectives have only become more relevant and necessary with the recent widespread acknowledgement of anthropogenic global environmental change, often called the Anthropocene, in which the intertwining of humans and nature is inherent.

The course touches on all six dimensions of sustainability as defined at OSU: human and natural systems; earth and environmental systems and sustainability; economy, governance, and sustainability; society, culture and sustainability; sustainable engineering, technology and design; and health, well-being and sustainability.

Course goals

1. Students understand foundational theories and methods in Political Ecology (PE). You can define key PE concepts, describe how they are used as analytical lenses, and critically read academic scholarship in PE.
2. Students understand the history of geographic thought in nature-society relations. You can describe ideas that led to emergence of PE in the 1970s and how PE differs from other approaches.
3. Students can apply PE theories and methods to analyze nature-society relations. You can identify and evaluate existing approaches in specific real-world issues and cases, including their ethical dimensions, especially as related to questions of difference and intersectional justice for humans and non-humans.
4. Students can apply PE theories and methods to analyze an issue of their own choosing. You are able to ask questions; gather, evaluate, analyze, and synthesize information; and communicate your findings in multiple formats.

Course requirements

Required course materials

There are 2-3 readings (or films) most weeks, divided between general readings, “current events” readings, and “academic articles” readings. There are assignments associated with each. A [full list of readings](#) is provided at the end of the syllabus. Course materials are available at no cost in Carmen.

Assignment overview (see the Course Schedule for due dates)

Category	Item percent	Category percent
Readings and reflections	~1.25% each	15%
Academic article write-ups	3@5% each	15%
Current events write-ups	4@10% each	40%
Semester project		30%
Topic	5%	
Update	5%	
Visual/presentation	12%	
Written	8%	

Readings and reflections (12 x 1.25% each):

There are twelve: one per set of readings and/or films. I grade these for completion and the lowest score will be dropped. Short, low-stakes responses improve learning by providing accountability and requiring you to think about course material. Academic integrity: You may discuss the assignment with other students in the class before writing your response, but you must do your own, unique write-up.

Academic article write-ups (3 x 5% each):

There are three, one per unit of the course except the Introduction. All articles will be topical, case-based political ecology articles by geographers, published in the last year. Each write-up is 500-600 words a) identifying the topic, argument, and key evidence, b) identifying political ecology theories and methods and how they matter in the analysis, c) identifying the contribution to geographic scholarship, and d) providing evaluation and personal reaction. Academic article write-ups teach you to read and evaluate academic literature, improve your understanding of PE theories and methods, improve your understanding of the development of geographic thought, and prepare you to conduct research.

Academic integrity: You may discuss the assignment with other students in the class before writing your response, but you must do your own, unique write-up.

Current events write-ups (4 x 10% each):

There are four, one per unit of the course. These will be news stories from reputable newspapers and magazines, published within a few months of when they are assigned. Each write-up is 500-600 words a) succinctly describing the issue at hand, b) identifying how PE *is* applied and/or suggesting how it *might be* applied and with what effect, and c) providing evaluation and personal reaction. These assignments take the place of quizzes and exams; they are designed to evaluate your knowledge of each unit's material. Current events write-ups give you practice applying course material to real-world events and prepare you to conduct research. Academic integrity: You may discuss the assignment with other students in the class before writing your response, but you must do your own, unique write-up.

Project (30% divided over 4-part assignment):

Students apply concepts and methods covered in the course to develop a political ecological account of a place that is meaningful to them. The project unfolds over the course of the semester, and we devote class time to the project throughout the semester. Early in the semester you will identify the place and a specific angle about it. For example, previous students' projects included: identification of the historical political economic processes that created the suburban subdivision they lived in as a kid, the factors that enabled Copenhagen to become one of the world's most sustainable cities, controversy over removal of a dam in a favorite park in their hometown, factors influencing water quality in the Chesapeake Bay, and the role of Māori conceptions of nature in New Zealand. The project can be based on library/internet review of existing knowledge or can include original research such as interviews or map analysis.

There are two scaffold assignments due in the second half of the semester in which you report on progress and receive feedback (5% each). The final project is to produce a visual and/or experiential product that you will present to the class, such as a photo essay, video, map, poster, artwork, performance, or even a fieldtrip (12%). You will also produce a written document that is complementary, providing context for the visual presentation (8%). This could be a short, research-based explanatory essay but could also take other formats, such as a personal essay or letter to a Congressperson. *Instead of the written project being primary with the visual illustrating it, here the visual/experiential is primary with the writing providing context.*

This assignment consolidates your knowledge about PE concepts and methods, gives you practice representing PE ideas in different formats, and requires you to apply PE not only beyond the classroom but to something meaningful in your own life.

Academic integrity: You are encouraged to talk about your project with others throughout the semester. You can propose a collaboration for the visual component of the project, but you must do your own, unique written document.

Grading

I grade all assignments on a 5-point scale: 5=excellent; 4=good; 3=passable; 0=missing or completely misses the mark. Rarely will I give a grade of 1 or 2. I limit my use of half points.

Final grade scale (lower cut-off): 93=A, 90=A-, 87=B+, 83=B, 80=B-, 77=C+, 73=C, 70=C-, 67=D+, 55=D

Course schedule (subject to change)

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>What's due (see Carmen)</u>
<u>Unit 1: Introduction to Political Ecology (2 weeks)</u>		
Tu 8/23:	Introduction to the course and each other	No assignments
Th 8/25:	Power, nature, difference, and knowledge	Read: Robbins Excerpt 1
Tu 8/30:	Why Political Ecology? History of the field	Read: Robbins Excerpt 2
Th 9/1:	History, cont.	Current events write-up 1
<u>Unit 2: Political ecology of environmental <i>degradation</i> (3 weeks)</u>		
Tu 9/6:	Colonialism and marginalization	Read: Robbins Excerpt 3
Th 9/8:	Colonialism and marginalization, cont.	No assignments
Tu 9/13:	Development	Read: Adger et al.
Th 9/15:	Development, cont.	Academic article write-up 1
Tu 9/20:	Population	Read: Sasser Ch 2, 4
Th 9/22:	Population, cont.	Current events write-up 2
<u>Unit 3: Political ecology of environmental <i>governance</i> (3 weeks)</u>		
Tu 9/27:	Protected areas, violence, and control	Read: Robbins Excerpt 4
Th 9/29:	Protected areas, cont.	No assignments
Tu 10/4:	Sustainable Development	Read: Mansfield; Watch: Suits and Savages (30 min)
Th 10/6:	Sustainable Development, cont.	Academic article write-up 2
Tu 10/11:	Market environmentalism	Read: Dempsey excerpt, Goldstein excerpt
Th 10/13:	NO CLASS, AUTUMN BREAK	
Tu 10/18:	Market environmentalism, cont.	Current events write-up 3
<u>Unit 4: Political ecology of <i>socionatures</i>: chemicals/environmental health (4 weeks)</u>		
Th 10/20:	21st Century Socionatures	Watch: My Louisiana Love (60 min)

Tu 10/25: Socionatures, cont.	Project topic
Th 10/27: Chemical geographies / toxic landscapes	Read: Lerner
Tu 11/1: Governing through risk	Read: Suryanaraynan and Kleinmen, Intro, Ch 4
Th 11/3: Risk, continued	No assignments
Tu 11/8: Green consumerism	Read: McKendrick Excerpts
Th 11/10: Green consumerism, continued	No assignments
Tu 11/15: Contesting toxicity	Project Update
Th 11/17: Contesting toxicity, cont.	Academic article write-up 3
<u>Unit 5: Semester projects (3 weeks)</u>	
Tu 11/22: Research time	Current events write-up 4
Th 11/24: NO CLASS, THANKSGIVING	
Tu 11/29: Catch-up and course conclusions	No assignments
Th 12/1: Project presentations	Visual product
Tu 12/6: Project presentations	Visual product
Finals week	Written product

[Inclusion Statements](#)

[Disability Services](#)

The University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please let me know immediately so that we can privately discuss options. To establish reasonable accommodations, I may request that you register with Student Life Disability Services. After registration, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. SLDS contact information: slds@osu.edu; 614-292-3307; slds.osu.edu; 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Avenue.

[Mental health](#)

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. The Ohio State University offers services to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing. If you or someone you know are suffering from any of the aforementioned conditions, you can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Office of Student Life's Counseling and Consultation Service (CCS) by visiting ccs.osu.edu or calling 614- 292-5766. CCS is located on the 4th Floor of the Younkin Success Center and 10th Floor of Lincoln Tower. You can reach an on-call counselor when CCS is closed at 614-292-5766 and 24 hour emergency help is also available through the 24/7 National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273- TALK or at suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

[Sexual misconduct/ relationship violence](#)

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories (e.g., race). If you or someone you know has been sexually harassed or assaulted, you can find resources at <http://titleix.osu.edu> or by contacting the Ohio State Title IX Coordinator, Kellie Brennan, at titleix@osu.edu.

[Diversity](#)

The Ohio State University affirms the importance and value of diversity in the student body. Our programs and curricula reflect our multicultural society and global economy and seek to provide opportunities for students to learn more about persons who are different from them. We are committed to maintaining a community that recognizes and values the inherent worth and dignity of

every person; fosters sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect among each member of our community; and encourages each individual to strive to reach his or her own potential. Discrimination against any individual based upon protected status, which is defined as age, color, disability, gender identity or expression, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status, is prohibited.

Statement on Academic Misconduct

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>.

List of readings

The “Current events” and “Academic article” readings will be chosen closer to the date they are assigned.

The general readings either provide overview of key concepts or are case studies, mainly drawn from academic books. The number of pages assigned from each book or articles is listed.

- Robbins, P. *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction* (3rd edition) (4 assignments, 10 pages each)
- Adger, W et al. 2001. Advancing a political ecology of global environmental discourses. In *Development and Change* (10 pages)
- Dempsey, Jessica. 2016. *Enterprising Nature: Economics, Markets, and Finance in Global Biodiversity Politics* (9 pages)
- Goldstein, J. 2018. *Planetary Improvement: Cleantech Entrepreneurship and the Contradictions of Green Capitalism* (15 pages)
- Lerner, S. 2021. The department of yes: how pesticide companies corrupted the EPA and poisoned America. In *The Intercept* (15 pages)
- Mansfield B. 2009. Sustainability. In *The Companion to Environmental Geography* (12 pages)
- McKendrick, Norah. 2018. *Better Safe than Sorry: How Consumers Navigate Exposure to Everyday Toxics* (30 pages)
- Sasser, Jade. 2018. *On Infertile Ground: Population Control and Women's Rights in the Era of Climate Change* (29 pages)
- Suryanarayanan, Sainath, and Daniel Kleinman. 2016. *Vanishing Bees: Science, Politics, and Honeybee Health* (31 pages)