

SPRING 2016
GEOG 470: Political Ecology

9:05-9:55am MWF, CH204
Instructor: Gabriela Valdivia

This course is an introduction to the theoretical and empirical approaches of political ecology. The phrase ‘political ecology’ describes a method for examining the relationship between the economy, politics, and ecological concerns. Political ecologists argue that the “how” and the “why” of the environment are fundamental for understanding environmental change, and the social change it motivates in turn.

This semester, we will focus on case studies in the U.S. and Latin America to address questions such as: how do markets, social structures, and population needs influence resource management practices, and vice versa? Whose voices and ideas count in the creation of protected areas, or in the designation of waste spaces—and why does it matter? When and how do we mobilize the natural and social sciences to improve explanations and pursue our environmental and ethical commitments?



Throughout the semester we will look at specific case studies and our immediate environments to: (1) examine the assumptions shaping our understanding of nature, conservation, and degradation and (2) extend our understanding of the reciprocal and dynamic relations between society and nature. Students will write two book reviews (see below), conduct spatial analysis using socioenvironmental data, and create visualizations of their own research projects, chosen in consultation with the instructor. At the end of the course students will have a deeper understanding of how political ecology can be used in their own fields and its relevance for understanding contemporary environmental issues.

Readings considered: Finney, C. (2014). *Black faces, white spaces: reimagining the relationship of African Americans to the great outdoors*. North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press; Lave, R. (2012). *Fields and streams: stream restoration, neoliberalism, and the future of environmental science*. Athens: University of Georgia Press; Lerner, S. (2005). *Diamond: a struggle for environmental justice in Louisiana’s chemical corridor*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.