Course Description: How has film shaped past and present interactions between humans and the environment across different cultures and landscapes? The success of *An Inconvenient Truth* and *March of the Penguins* and the impact, in all of its myriad meanings, of *Blue Vinyl* and *The Real Dirt on Farmer John* are recent reminders of the extent to which film can inform and engage the public in critical environmental issues that affect human and animal lives across the globe. And, yet, the very different conventions of these films also remind us, as the French film critic, André Bazin, once noted: “The bounds of the science film are as undefined as those of the documentary. But, after all, who cares!”

We take Bazin’s dilettantish attitude toward scientific cinema in exploring the history and theory of an amalgam of films that, for better or worse, might be labeled environmental cinema. As this seminar reveals, however, what we call environmental cinema is itself shaped by the changing cultural and social meanings of nature and the environment over time. From travelogue-exploration films of the 1920s, to the experimental avant-garde of surrealist scientific filmmakers such as Jean Painlevé, from the worlds of Walt Disney to those of Jacques Cousteau, from the social documentaries of John Grierson and Pare Lorentz to more contemporary cinema documenting the struggles of peoples confronting issues of environmental injustice across the globe, this seminar will call students to rethink the ways in which cinema has shaped how we see, think about, consume, and politicize nature in both past and present societies.

Course Requirements:
Discussion (25%): This seminar is primarily designed as a reading/viewing/discussion seminar. Each one in class needs to assume the responsibility of an active participant and learner. Success in the class depends largely upon the time, energy, and commitment you invest. You will be required to arrive at class having attended the required film screening on Thursday evening, read the material assigned for the day, and be prepared to engage in a thoughtful and constructive conversation that is respectful of others in the classroom and takes seriously the issues and themes presented in the films and readings. You need to post at least one comment or question on the films screened to the course webpage at [https://uwmad.courses.wisconsin.edu/d2l/orgTools/ouHome/ouHome.asp?ou=539576](https://uwmad.courses.wisconsin.edu/d2l/orgTools/ouHome/ouHome.asp?ou=539576)
before the start of the class session in which the films will be discussed.

If any problem arises, either academic or personal, that might jeopardize your performance in the course, you must try to inform me of the problem at the next available office hour, or by leaving a message with the Department of Medical History and Bioethics (262-1460).

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, I urge any student in this course with a disability to inform me as soon as possible, so that I may make any necessary accommodations to ensure full participation and facilitate your educational opportunities. All such requests are confidential.

Students are expected to familiarize themselves with the UW policies on plagiarism and to assume responsibility for honesty in all course work.

Film Review (15%): Choose a film, either screened in class, or one approved in consultation with us, and write a 1,000 word review essay that discusses how the film was received during its time. Can you provide evidence of how the film effected change, either in people’s response to the film or in their actions. What was the venue and context in which the film was screened? Due, October 12

Film Festival (20%): You are required to attend the film festival, Tales From Planet Earth ([http://www.nelson.wisc.edu/tales](http://www.nelson.wisc.edu/tales)) from Nov. 2-4, and see at least five films. We will have a sign up sheet at each of the screenings for you to sign. In addition, you are to watch one of the following films at the festival: Return of Navajo Boy, The Silent Enemy, or Ten Canoes. Write a 1,000 word essay that discusses the film in relation to the material we read and discussed on the ethical and political issues involved in the filming and representation of indigenous peoples. Due, November 9.

Research Paper (40%): You are to choose a recent or historical environmental film and write a 15-20 page essay analyzing its myriad impacts—economic, cultural, political, and social. Who made the film and why? In what context was the film shown and seen? What was its audience? How was the film received by critics and the public? Did the film alter public attitudes toward nature or the environment in significant ways? What kinds of evidence can you draw upon for measuring a film’s impact? These are the kinds of questions you will be pursuing in this essay. Due, December 14.

**Required Readings:**

The following required books are available at the University Bookstore:


A course packet (CP) is also available in the Department of History of Science, 7143 Social Science Building for purchase. The articles will also be placed on reserve at Helen C. White College Library.
People

9/7 A Place for Stories


9/14 Capturing Place
John Grierson, “Flaherty” and “First Principles of Documentary,” in Grierson on Documentary, edited and compiled by Forsyth Hardy (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), pp. 139-156. CP, 77-88.

Paul Rotha, Documentary Film (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), pp. 115-120. CP, 89-94.


9/21 Imagining Indians


See, also, http://www.onf.ca

9/28 First Person Toxic
Barbara Allen, “Telling Stories about the Environment,” in Uneasy Alchemy: Citizens and Experts in Louisiana’s Chemical Corridor Disputes (Cambridge: MIT


Wildlife
10/5 Animal Attractions


10/12 The Stories We Tell


10/19 The Culture of Nature


10/26 The Media of Conservation


Richard Brock, “FFC Conservation Filmmaker of the Year Award,” 4 pp. CP, 519-522.


11/2 NO CLASS

Hybrid Landscapes

11/9 Great White Hunting

Fatimah Tobing Rony, The Third Eye, pp. 2-20, 45-73.


11/16 Invasive Species


11/23 NO CLASS

11/30 From the Factory to the Farm
Visit the website and resource links for Homecoming at: http://www.pbs.org/itvs/homecoming/home.html

David Walsh, “Interview with Travis Wilkerson, director of An Injury to One,” Toronto International Film Festival 2002. CP, 677-682.


12/7 Unnatural Disaster


12/14 Wrap-Up

SCREENINGS
Thursdays, 7:00-9:30 pm (Screenings in September will be held in Rm. 175, Science Hall)

9/6 The Grapes of Wrath (1940, 129 min.)
The River (1937, 32 min.)
Let My People Live (1938, 13 min.)

9/13 The Man of Aran (1934, 76 min.)
How the Myth Was Made (1978, 58 min.)
9/20 PSA of Ecological Indian
   *In the Land of the War Canoes* (1914, 43 min.)
   *Intrepid Shadows* (1966, 18 min.)
   *Imagining Indians* (1992, 60 min.)

9/27 Helfand Screening – Sundance Cinemas, Hilldale Mall
   *Blue Vinyl* (2002, 98 min.), with selections from the Peabody award-winning prequel *
   *Healthy Baby Girl*

10/4 Comandon footage
   Edison’s *Electrocuting an Elephant* (1903)
   Coolidge footage
   *Winged Migration* (2001, 89 min.)

10/11 *The Seaborse* (1934, 15 min.)
   *Beaver Valley* (1950, 32 min.)
   Siegel Screening – Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, 227 State Street
   *The Beloved* (1998, 15 min.)
   *The Disenchanted Forest* (2001, 52 min.)

10/18 Burden East Indian Expedition
   *King Kong*
   *Miss Jane Goodall and the Wild Chimpanzees*

10/25 *The Family that Lives with Elephants* (1976, 30 min.)
   *Africa’s Elephant Kingdom* (1997, 40 min.)
   *Ocean Oasis* (2003, 75 min.)

11/8 Coolidge material

11/15 *Cane Toads* (1988, 47 min.)
   WWII pest or Smokey the Bear film

11/29 *Homecoming* (1999, 56 min.)
   *An Injury to One* (2002, 53 min.)

12/6 Weather Channel
   Helfand’s rough cut of *Heat Wave*

12/13 Final projects of production class