RE-WILDING HARVARD

FAS History 1973: Conference Course

Wednesday, 12:45-2:45 pm

History Conference Room

Robinson Hall

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Office Hrs: Mon. 3-5 pm

Robinson 123

Harvard University exists on unceded Native land,

whose Indigenous people conserved the areaâ€™s natural resources.

Harvard â€œdevelopedâ€ these resources.

Western science is now identifying reasons why Indigenous conservation was a better idea.

This class uses history to make a difference in the world. Rewilding returns a place to an earlier form to promote biodiversity; urban rewilding does this within urban spaces, including Harvardâ€™s. In this class, we will research historical and cultural definitions of wilderness and landscape, identify what precolonial ecosystems were like in New England, discuss how such places might be restored, and contribute to a ten-year urban rewilding plan for Harvard. This year, we will 1.) assess existing rewilded spaces around Harvard while projecting how many more such spaces might be needed for significant ecosystem recovery, and 2.) reconstruct Harvardâ€™s loss of natural spaces over time by using GIS (geographic information systems) to analyze historical maps. The class is open to undergraduates and graduate students, and it fulfills undergraduate seminar credit in the History Department; there are no prerequisites.

Many cultures conserve physical places and restore natural resources. Within Europe, attempts to preserve woodlands and topsoil go back to the middle ages; recreating â€œwildernessâ€ became an aesthetic preference for European gardens in the eighteenth century; preserving large wilderness areas began in the late nineteenth century, notably in the United States. Recently, some wildlife biologists have urged massive restoration of wild landscapes, maybe up to half of the planet.

And yet there are serious questions about the feasibility of such plans and their implications for social justice. Designation of wilderness areas has a long history of inflicting their costs on working, Indigenous, or non-European peoples. Rewilding has been defined, troublingly, as if any human presence in the natural world is malign. Given these histories, rewilding should now be done in places where its proponents live and work, not somewhere â€œout there,â€ and should welcome all communities, including those historically excluded from urban green spacesâ€”or from certain cities entirely. Finally, rewilding projects must serve larger societal goods, such as fostering pollinators critical to food security, counteracting urban heat islands, reducing urban flooding, and diminishing use of pesticides and herbicides.

We are now three years into the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration (2021-30), which encourages rewilding. But the necessary scale of rewilding projects is still unknown. Must they be extensive and spatially continuous? Or would smaller, discontinuous spaces have comparable benefit? Within Harvardâ€™s built environment, smaller spaces are available and therefore worth experimenting with. But how many? Two earlier versions of this class rewilded two small spaces and itâ€™s therefore a good moment to pause and consider the next steps. So, using current scientific literature on urban wilding, and analyzing past and present maps with GIS, we will hypothesize the necessary scale of Harvardâ€™s ecosystem restoration.

COURSE STRUCTURE

The class is a collaborative seminar. We will meet for two hours each week except when students will work in small groups. Relevant experts and Harvard stakeholders will visit the class at several pointsâ€”or we will go visit them. Because of the complexity of scheduling such visits, dates for them may change on the syllabus below. We will use GIS but, donâ€™t worry, you donâ€™t need to have any background with

it before class (and itâ€™s fun).

GOALS

1. Learn the history and cultural meanings of landscape, ecosystem restoration, rewilding.
2. Learn the basics of GIS and historic digital mapping.
3. Learn how to work collaboratively.
4. Help protect and expand biodiversity at Harvard.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Attendance and participation in class discussion (30% of grade).
2. Assignment I, rewilding pitch or proposal (15%), due 9 pm, Feb. 9.
3. Assignment II, annotated bibliography of three articles on scale, design, and ecosystem restoration (15%), due 9 pm, Feb. 23.
4. Assignment III, historic map base and GIS layers OR analysis of present-day map of Harvard (15%), due 9 pm, Mar. 23.
5. Completion of the classâ€™s overall analysisâ€”tasks TBD week of Apr. 6â€”(25%), 9 pm, May 1.

Late Policy: Each student can draw on a personal 12-hour paper extension â€œbankâ€ to use as desiredâ€”though it canâ€™t be used for the final assignment (whose due date is out of my hands).

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism, submitting someone elseâ€™s writing or ideas as your own, is a serious academic offense. Please familiarize yourself with Harvardâ€™s policy on plagiarism here: https://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/harvard-plagiarism-policy. Students who plagiarize will receive a failing grade for the assignment and will face disciplinary procedures as determined by the University administration. Given the grave consequences of plagiarism in this course, please consult with me before a deadline if you are unsure whether or how to cite a source. Also, if you use AI for any of your writing, please note that in any submitted work.

Accessibility: This course should provide all students with an environment conducive to intellectual growth, and I encourage you to speak with me about anything that might improve your access to course materials or activities. Harvardâ€™s Accessible Education Office (AEO) notes: â€œStudents needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the AEO and speak with the professor by the end of the second week of the term. Failure to do so may result in the Course Head's inability to respond in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential, although Faculty are invited to contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation.â€

SCHEDULE

(An * indicates a reading available as a PDF under Files on Canvas.)

Jan. 24: Into the Wild

OED, look up: â€œwild,â€ â€œwildness,â€ â€œwilderness.â€

William Cronon, â€œThe Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,â€ *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York, 1995), 69-90.

Ramachandra Guha, â€œRadical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique,â€ *Environmental Ethics*, 11 (1989): 71-83.

Dolly JÃ¸rgensen, â€œRethinking Rewilding,â€ *Geoforum*, 65 (Oct. 2015): 482-88.

Jan. 31: Indigenous Natures

Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis, 2013), 1-10.

Jean M. Oâ€™Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis, 2010), xi-xxvi.

E. K. Faison, D. R. Foster, W. W. Oswald, B.C.S. Hansen, and E. Doughty, â€œEarly Holocene Openlands in Southern New England,â€ *Ecology*, 87 (2006): 2537-47.

Feb. 7: Settler Colonialism

John Josselyn, *New-Englandâ€™s Rarities Discovered* (London, 1672), 41-87.

William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York, 1983). Copies on reserve at Lamont and the Frances Loeb Library. Any edition is fine!

Visit the rewilding planter/exhibit in front of the the Harvard Museum of Natural History to get a sense of what a rewilded place looks like in a New England winter.

Assignment I: write a 500-word statement in favor of rewilding. This short assignment is designed to teach you how to write a grant proposal or other pitch. Your proposal should have: an intended recipient; a central point (what kind of rewilding? And why?); citations to relevant texts weâ€™ve read. **Please upload your paper to Canvas by 9 pm, Feb. 9.**

Feb. 14: New England Landscapes

Virginia Scott Jenkins, *The Lawn: A History of an American Obsession* (Washington, DC, 1994), 9-33.

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (Boston, 1854), â€œThe Bean-Field,â€ and â€œSpring.â€

David R. Foster, â€œThoreauâ€™s Country: A Historical-ecological Perspective to Conservation in the New England Landscape,â€ *Journal of Biogeography,* 29 (2002): 1537-55.

Introduction to historic maps at the Map Collection, 12:45-1:45, and introduction to Felt (our GIS tool), 1:45-2:45. Felt is a newer browser-based GIS system we can use without having to download desktop software onto our laptops.

Feb. 21: Historical Landscapes

*Peter Peller, â€œFrom Paper Map to Geospatial Vector Layer: Demystifying the Process,â€ *IASSIST Quarterly*, 42 (2018): 1-22.

Boston Public Library, Atlascope Project: https://www.atlascope.org/

FIRST GIS workshop, guided by map librarian Belle Lipton.

Assignment II: using hollis.harvard.edu (and if necessary, Google), search for peer-reviewed articles (not included on this syllabus) that discuss urban wilding by assessing the optimal scale and design of such plans. What spaces, over what distances, and according to which designs seem to be optimal? Find three such works and compose an annotated bibliography: 50 words summarizing each article. **Submit your bibliography to Canvas by 9 pm, Feb. 23.**

Feb. 28: GIS and Reconstructing Harvardâ€™s Spatial History

Karl Haglund, *Inventing the Charles River* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), xv-xxi, 187-231.

*Gary R. Hildebrand, â€œReciprocal Narratives on Campus: Two Olmsted Brothers Cases,â€ *Landscape and the Academy*, ed., John Beardsley and Daniel Bluestone (Cambridge, MA, 2019), 39-65.

SECOND GIS workshop. At the end of this, you will choose one of three projects:

- **Surveying Harvard today to compose a list of types of built surface (non-porous pavement, semi-porous pavement, building, green spaces, etc.â€”for this, you will consult Google maps and walk out parts of Harvard),**
- **Analyzing historic map(s) on Felt, using skills we learned in class,**
- **Independent optionâ€”you define your project!â€”depending on your preexisting level of skill with historic maps and GIS.**

Mar. 6: no class, instead youâ€™ll work within your designated project group, either in person or remotely (or a hybrid). We will have to determine the specifics of the tasks depending on the size of each project group, with an eye toward fair distribution of labor.

Mar. 20: Greener Harvards

Arnold Arboretum: Our History and The Emerald Necklace

Benjamin Goulet-Scott, dir., â€œUrban Wilds of the Arnold Arboretum.â€

https://hmsc.harvard.edu/rewilding

Harvard Forest, New Grant: Seeing and Hearing Indigenous Voices on the Land, Oct. 20, 2022.

Mar. 27: Tour of Rewilded Spaces

With consideration for any studentâ€™s mobility needs, we will use todayâ€™s class to go look at some rewilded sites around Harvard.

Assignment III: the historic mapping groups must submit their composite map and the analyzers of a present-day Harvard map must submit their report on categories for layers and attributes for that map with a 750-1000 word explanation of 1.) why these features would be relevant to rewilding and 2.) why they are appropriate for GIS analysis. **Please submit these by 9 pm, Mar. 29.** You can use the extension bank for this exercise, but the extension will apply to each person in the group. (If someone has an emergency, that wonâ€™t be held against the group!)

Apr. 3: Urban Places

Donald C. Dearborn, Salit Kark, â€œMotivations for Conserving Urban Biodiversity,â€ *Conservation Biology*, 24 (2010): 432-40.

Simon G. Potts, Vera Imperatriz-Fonseca, Hien T. Ngo, Marcelo A. Aizen, Jacobus C. Biesmeijer, et al., â€œSafeguarding Pollinators and Their Values to Human Well-being,â€ Nature, 2016, Vol. 540 (7632), 220-229.

Julia Hong, â€œBoston Neighborhoods Impacted by Urban Heat,â€ May 14, 2020.

Nicholas E. Tew et al., â€œTurnover in Floral Composition Explains Species Diversity and Temporal Stability in the Nectar Supply of Urban Residential Gardens,â€ *Journal of Applied Ecology* 59 (2022), 801-11.

Boston Harbor Now, Flood Maps (c. 2015).

We will also discuss how to fit all parts of the group projects into one final report from the whole class; we will allocate any remaining tasks for this fairly.

Apr. 10: no class. This week, work on your part of our final report. **Please upload your delegated portions of this onto Canvas by 9 pm, Friday, Apr. 12, and the friendly professor will bolt everything together.**

Apr. 17: discussion of final report draft posted on Canvas.

Apr. 24: assessment of report with Belle Lipton.

May 1: submit final, final draft of report to Canvas, 9 pm.

In the area below, provide basic, standard course information ahead of registration period to help students make informed course choices. Click the EDIT button and input your responses by over-writing the field description below each bolded heading. Consult the IT Help knowledge base or reach out to FAS Academic Technology at atg@fas.harvard.edu for assistance.

Course goals:

Describe the specific knowledge, skills and abilities that students will learn or develop in your course.

Course format:

In what format is the course conducted (ex: lecture and required discussion section). How is class time spent?

Typical enrollees:

Who is this course primarily designed for?

When is course typically offered?

fall; spring; both semesters; occasionally; one time only

What can students expect from you as an instructor?

What is your teaching style?

Assignments and grading:

Describe principal assignments and assessments. Provide a provisional percentage-based breakdown of how each requirement will factor into the overall grade. Indicate the end-of-term assessment.

Sample reading list:

(optional) *Indicate your sample reading list or upload the document to your course files and link to the file in this space*.

Enrollment cap, selection process, notification:

(Optional--for limited enrollment courses) What is your selection process? Will certain students be prioritized or (e.g., concentrators; upper-level students; first-years only)? How will students be notified of their admission? If there is a website that describes your controlled enrollment application and selection process, please provide the link.

Past syllabus:

If the course will be taught in the same manner it has been, please post an example syllabus; if not, explain how it will be different. *To post a syllabus document, upload the file to your course files and link to the file in this space*.

Absence and late work policies:

Provide information here.