Practical Ethics for Resource Managers
FOR: 421

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Forests are land areas on which are associated various forms of plant and animal life. The forester must deal with all. Wildlife is as essentially and legitimately an object of his care as are water, wood and forage. – September 1941 edition of the Roosevelt Wildlife Bulletin

There are two ways to apply conservation to land. One is to superimpose some particular practice upon the pre-existing system of land-use, without regard to how it fits or what it does to or for other interests involved. The other is to reorganize and gear up the farming, forestry, game cropping, erosion control, scenery, or whatever values may be involved so that they collectively comprise a harmonious balanced system of land-use. – A. Leopold, 1935

Course Description: This course meets online (M-W-F) and for one weekend in residence (Newcomb Campus/Huntington Wildlife Forest) providing an introduction to the history and function of ethics and rhetoric in the context of forestry and related fields. Emphasis is on establishing an ethically sound position, aligning competing values and priorities among interested parties and effectively communicating management decisions. Through the successful completion of all prior coursework, students should understand the economic, social, political and ecological aspects of forestry. This course will take that knowledge further to teach the ethical and rhetorical skills necessary to professionally navigate and balance these often-competing domains, culminating in the group design and presentation of a decision plan in consultation with a resource professional. The practical application and situational analysis aspects of this course are designed for preparation in resource management careers. This course is relevant for students in any major and is recommended for those who want to improve critical thinking, public speaking, conflict resolution and problem solving, groupwork and collaboration skills. This course is required for graduating seniors in FRM.

Students are expected to have successfully completed all required coursework up through their junior year and preference will be given to ESF’s graduating seniors, for whom the course is required. This course will augment prior content/coursework by helping students to understand ethical complexities and to discern and effectively communicate their position within contested situations.

Learning Outcomes: Abstract moral or ethical theory becomes practical in the act of working philosophical concepts into dynamic, real-world situations and circumstances. Practical ethics attempts to reconcile the functional limits of right-doing in a reality where what one should do doesn't map neatly onto what one can do. This style of ethics is particularly useful in
environmental fields like resource management where benefit and harm coexist, leaving the call and the consequence to professionals. An introduction to practical ethics teaches how to hold personal values, professional obligations and responsible stewardship together when we are up against the limits of what is possible.

Upon completion of this course, students will be prepared to enter the profession with a basic understanding of 1) the skills necessary to identify and address an ethically-weighted situation 2) collaborative problem solving and decision planning and 3) the rhetorical competence to explain and defend their plans and proposals to stakeholders. Specifically, students will be prepared to apply the following method to ethically resolve a complex management situation:

- Analyze a professional situation in order to identify the ethical tensions and competing stakeholder priorities obscuring its resolution.
- Based on knowledge and understanding of a range of ethical/philosophical approaches, identify those most likely to be effective in addressing the situation.
- Synthesize these ethical and rhetorical approaches taking the history of forest and natural resources management into account in order to formulate a correct path forward.
- Apply the chosen approaches in order to determine/test their suitability and revise as needed.
- Using rhetorical techniques, communicate your decision, evaluate the resolution proposed and revise as needed again based on how the positions of constituents, your interpretation of the situation and or the situation itself changes over time.

After completing this course students should be able to apply each ethical method to discussions concerning:

- Local/regional perspectives on land use conflicts and the philosophical history of these ideas including:
  - What ethics means and how it has been understood throughout western philosophy
  - How changing norms of ethics and fairness have been positioned over time to reinforce, modify, challenge and evaluate environmental issues
  - Who is and who ought to be considered in any complex situation
- The nature and agency of ethics, value theory, morality and responsibility and the ways that these elements influence ongoing discussions of land-use, particularly:
  - How issues of culture and environment are played out in the context of land-use tensions
  - How certain philosophical ideas underlie and inform contemporary practices in resource management
Instructional methods used to meet the course outcomes:

Asynchronous Learning

- Recorded lectures and subsequent *Discussions of Practical Relevance* will provide both a basic understanding of ethical/philosophical methods and how these approaches play out in the field.
  - These lectures and discussions will include professionals from across resource management fields including fisheries, wildlife, forestry, public and private land easement managers, Office of Public Protection personnel (Forest Rangers and Encon Officers), industry foresters including those at TIMO's, paper companies and mills. Topics in the order listed in the Schedule and Course Outline below will review key historical and contemporary approaches to practical ethics and their impacts on current issues of concern to Resources Management. We will consider the evolution, implications and limitations of each perspective and the tensions that exist between differing ethical methods bringing philosophical concepts to bear on Resources Management decisions. Our aim is to understand how these abstract concepts become useful tools in management contexts.
  - Resources Management professionals will play a key role in bringing the theory into focus by describing how they have employed each method to resolve a particular conflict in the field. Students will respond to comprehension questions immediately following each lecture and recorded discussion.

- Required reading, writing and discussion as assigned each week
  - Students will write one, two-page *Critical Reading Response* to each assigned set of readings and will respond substantively to one of their peer's submissions during weekly class meetings. Student understanding of and proficiency with the material will be evaluated based on established criteria and the final working group project.
  - *Talk of the Trade* requires that students select a full length paper, column or essay from a resources management related publication (popular and peer reviewed are acceptable) or participate in a webinar on a related subject (SAF, Forest Stewards Guild, university extension program offerings) and present a summary overview of the paper/workshop in weekly small group discussion sections. This is an opportunity for students to research publications and topics related to their particular area of interest, to bring a variety of subjects into the class discussion in order to achieve a comprehensive view of how ethics is considered and activated across the range of professional domains within resources management.

Synchronous Learning

- The class will be divided into groups of ~5 students who will meet with the instructor for discussion seminar during class hours on Monday, Wednesday or Friday. These groups will hold throughout the semester, students assigned to each group will work together to complete the final project. Groups will be assigned during the orientation field trip at HWF.
  - Weekly small group discussions via video conferencing will review module and unit topics, readings, discuss asynchronous assignments/lectures.
Periodic video conferencing with a professional assigned to each group, progress reports and final project completion, all in collaboration with professional foresters and resource managers. In small working groups, students will connect theoretical ethics with real-world situations through case-studies provided by professionals. Professionals will help students to understand the reality and complexity associated with land management decisions. Groups will reach consensus, establish a plan (written component) and present their decision to the class during finals week via live video conferencing. At this time, groups will open their resolution, methods etc. up for further discussion and possible revision. Final and revised decision plans will be submitted by each group for a final grade.

- Forest field tour and ethics on the ground, HWF field tour, TBA.

Learning Objectives and Assessment:

- Demonstrate critical thinking skills through oral and written responses to assigned readings. Student responses will demonstrate a working knowledge of the topics addressed by the author, including the nuance and broader implications of the text. Students will interpret the author’s claims and offer a thoughtful, thorough and scholarly opinion of the reading. Student knowledge and proficiency will be assessed based on 1) the successful completion of one written response to each of the assigned readings along with competent oral and written responses to classmates 2) small group written report and presentation.

- Demonstrate written communication skills through the completion of the assignments (detailed above) particularly the ability to bring learned concepts into a final presentation. Student proficiency in this area will be evaluated based largely on a successful presentation that shows comprehension and application of the topics addressed in class.

- Demonstrate verbal communication skills by responding substantively in class conversations to show that considerable attention has been paid to the readings/lectures. Additionally, the final project will require each student to verbally communicate classroom learning to the instructor, assigned natural resource professional and their peers. Students must successfully demonstrate a consistent willingness and ability to communicate thoughtfully with the instructor, to be actively involved in a way that respects differences of opinion and shows engagement with the material.

- Demonstrate interdisciplinary literacy by becoming involved in the complexities of the history and contemporary landscape of western philosophy and ethics especially how these concepts are applied to real-world situations. Each module will begin with 1) required readings in the history of western philosophy related to the module topic followed by 2) required readings from history of American forestry and the environment. This pairing will illustrate how these historical theories pull through into modern environmental debates and can be used to work through ethical situations that students will encounter in resource management fields.
Student Expectations and Assignments:

Required texts
- Journal articles available in the Content Collection

Grading and student evaluation will be based on
- Successful completion, timeliness and correct formatting of written assignments including written responses (comprehension questions) to recorded lectures as assigned. (25%)
- Full participation in the collaborative professional project including meeting deadlines, working with peers as assigned to develop a Decision Plan, project/presentation and revision (co-evaluation by the instructor and participating professionals). (50%)
- Class participation including productive involvement in all synchronous and asynchronous discussion, evidence of engagement with and comprehension of theories and texts. (25%)
- Full participation in the field trip to HWF is required. Students who cannot attend must defer enrollment in this class until the following semester.

Each week students will
- Listen/watch one Section Topic Lecture and respond in writing as instructed. Viewing will be tracked through Blackboard and a series of comprehension questions will be answered and submitted to the instructor immediately following each lecture. (1HR)
- Listen/watch one Discussion of Practical Relevance with a resource professional on the section topic, illustrating how the theory explored in this section becomes actionable in the field. Viewing will be tracked through Blackboard and a series of comprehension questions will be answered immediately following each talk. (1HR)
- Participate in one seminar discussion that draws together the Section Topic Lecture, Discussion of Practical Relevance and the assigned reading and/or Talk of the Trade topics. (1HR)

In addition to these weekly synchronous and asynchronous assignments and activities, students will
- Respond in writing to section-topic prompts related to the weekly readings. Each essay will be evaluated based on the successful completion, marked improvement, comprehension of the material and overall quality of these assignments. Written assignments are due in the course Drop Box no later than 5pm Sunday evening, each week. All late assignments and/or submissions that don’t follow the style sheet provided in the course materials will be reduced by one letter grade.
- Submit the midterm paper according to the timeline and guidelines provided.
Participate in conferences with an assigned resource professional throughout the second half of the term to develop a written decision plan and presentation/final project according to the timeline and guidelines provided.

**Schedule and Course Outline:** Recorded lectures and Discussions of Practical Relevance will review key historical and contemporary approaches to practical ethics as they relate to forestry, the history of forestry and related fields. We will consider the evolution, implications and limitations of each philosophical perspective and the tensions that exist between differing ethical methods in practice. Our aim is to examine critically how these abstract concepts become useful tools in the context of Resource Management. The general topics to be addressed each week through reading and writing assignments are below, additional readings will be assigned from the Content Collection.

Students are required to be in-residence at ESF’s Newcomb Campus on the Huntington wildlife Forest during the first weekend of the term, arriving Saturday and departing on Monday (College-wide holiday, no class conflicts). During this residency students will be assigned a cohort with whom they will work closely for the remainder of the term, learn in detail how the class will be conducted (synchronous and asynchronous formats), understand what will be asked of them in each mode and organize their class materials. Perhaps most importantly, this trip is an opportunity for students and the instructor to begin in person, a working relationship that will continue via distance for the remainder of the term. **Attendance is mandatory** and achieving residency objectives is crucial to the successful completion of the course. Travel and coordination details will be handled in the days prior to departure, students should pay attention to announcements and discussions in Blackboard to be sure they understand expectations for the trip.

**MODULE/WEEK 1. The Philosophical History Contemporary Relevance and Resource Management Applications of Community Ethics.** Community ethics asks whether a particular choice/behavior serves the common welfare of the community. In the context of resource management, the once-simple notion of “community” becomes magnified and its definition is brought into question.

**Formats & Assignments:**
- **Asynchronous:** Recorded lecture and corresponding professional interview/conversation will be followed by comprehension questions to be completed within the time to be designated.
- **Asynchronous:** Respond in writing to section-topic prompts in Blackboard that are related to the weekly required readings and make substantive comment on posts made by a classmate from a different discussion group.
- **Synchronous:** Weekly class/small group discussions via video conferencing will review lecture, discussion topics and readings. **Groups will be assigned and given a time and day of the week which will remain consistent throughout the semester.**
Reading:

MODULE/WEEK 2. The Philosophical History Contemporary Relevance and Resource Management Applications of Virtue Ethics. Moving from an emphasis on the group to the individual, virtue ethics compels us to evaluate whether certain choices and behaviors do justice to our best selves. Considerations here include whether a behavior is consistent with “right-focused desire” or desire for the highest good through just, courageous and prudent action. Here we begin to wrestle with the complexity and perhaps the necessity of holding personal virtue together with the business of forestry.

Formats & Assignments:
- Asynchronous: Recorded lecture and corresponding professional interview/conversation will be followed by comprehension questions to be completed within the time to be designated.
- Asynchronous: Respond in writing to section-topic prompts in Blackboard that are related to the weekly required readings and make substantive comment on posts made by a classmate from a different discussion group.
- Synchronous: Weekly class/small group discussions via video conferencing will review lecture, discussion topics and readings.

Reading:

MODULE/WEEK 3. The Philosophical History Contemporary Relevance and Resource Management Applications of Rights Ethics. In light of the prior approaches, what can we make of Rights Ethics in the contemporary landscape which acknowledges the full range of human and non-human value and where actions are wrong to the extent that they commit harm or lead to a destabilized system. Assuming a comprehensive idea of what and whom we value, how might we take rights into our ethical accounting?
Formats & Assignments:
- Asynchronous: Recorded lecture and corresponding professional interview/conversation will be followed by comprehension questions to be completed within the time to be designated.
- Asynchronous: Respond in writing to section-topic prompts in Blackboard that are related to the weekly required readings and make substantive comment on posts made by a classmate from a different discussion group.
- Synchronous: Weekly class/small group discussions via video conferencing will review lecture, discussion topics and readings.

Reading:

MODULE/WEEK 4. The Philosophical History Contemporary Relevance and Resource Management Applications of Utilitarian Ethics. A utilitarian approach to resource management requires that we identify and preserve wellbeing across ecological communities or, that we acknowledge that the “greatest good and the least harm” will often leave other-than-human individuals and certain human and non-human communities out of the calculation of benefit. We must also consider what constitutes harm or good and benefit and decide over what time horizon we should measure.

Formats & Assignments:
- Asynchronous: Recorded lecture and corresponding professional interview/conversation will be followed by comprehension questions to be completed within the time to be designated.
- Synchronous: Weekly class/small group discussions via video conferencing will review lecture, discussion topics and readings.

Reading:
- This recurring Talk of the Trade unit requires that students read a full length paper, column or essay from a resource management related publication (popular and peer reviewed are acceptable) or that they participate in a webinar on a related subject (SAF, Forest Stewards Guild, university extension program offerings). Students should be prepared to present a detailed overview of the reading including how it relates to the subject of this course. Students are encouraged to seek out publications that address particular areas of the country, agencies, industries and issues that are of personal/professional interest. Instructor-approved list will be provided, additional publications can be approved upon request. Papers that have been selected by students will be uploaded into Blackboard and available to the full class.
MODULE/WEEK 5. The Philosophical History Contemporary Relevance and Resource Management Applications of Justice and Fairness Ethics. This approach asks how objectively fair an action is and requires us to evaluate whether it shows favoritism and/or discrimination to parties involved. We will set circumstances aside in an attempt to reconcile a management issue through this lens alone.

Formats & Assignments:
- Asynchronous: Recorded lecture and corresponding professional interview/conversation will be followed by comprehension questions to be completed within the time to be designated.
- Asynchronous: Respond in writing to section-topic prompts in Blackboard that are related to the weekly required readings and make substantive comment on posts made by a classmate from a different discussion group.
- Synchronous: Weekly class/small group discussions via video conferencing will review lecture, discussion topics and readings.

Reading:

MODULE/WEEK 6. The Philosophical History Contemporary Relevance and Resource Management Applications of Care Ethics. As a critical feminist response to Justice and Fairness ethics, this approach brings circumstances back into our ethical calculation along with the relational and power dynamics at play among constituencies.

Formats & Assignments:
- Asynchronous: Recorded lecture and corresponding professional interview/conversation will be followed by comprehension questions to be completed within the time to be designated.
- Asynchronous: Respond in writing to section-topic prompts in Blackboard that are related to the weekly required readings and make substantive comment on posts made by a classmate from a different discussion group.
- Synchronous: Weekly class/small group discussions via video conferencing will review lecture, discussion topics and readings.

Readings:

MODULE/WEEK 7. Midterm. In our readings thus far, Gifford Pinchot has presented an anthropocentric vision of forest management that holds national and economic security as well as benefits for future generations of citizens at the fore. This represents one approach to Resource Management that remains an industry standard and informs best practices in the interest of human flourishing over time. Pinchot’s human-centered utilitarianism remains common in forestry and forest science, alongside an increased emphasis on a biotic approach to landscapes across environmental fields. Pinchot’s utilitarian approach to forestry emphasizes the harvest and extraction of a commodity, in order to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number over time. Aldo Leopold’s biotic worldview broadens the definition of community to include bonds between the human and non-human world for the purpose ecological flourishing. The tension between these two perspectives informs and complicates 21st century forestry in the United States. In Leopold's argument for greater protections, and without abandoning the notion of the forest as a public utility, he enlarges the definition of utility and worth in such a way that might close the distance between the two foresters’ ideas concerning conservation’s highest good. The midterm paper will address the philosophical origins and practical implications of this tension through the ethical approaches studied thus far. At least three sources should be selected from the class reading list plus three additional sources from one’s own or classmates Talk of the Trade papers/essays. Requirements and guidelines TBA.

MODULE/WEEK 8. Students will begin to communicate with the professional assigned to their Working Group via video conference with an eye towards the final project. Students will integrate the content and ethical approaches learned thus far throughout the semester with situations provided by professionals in a written report aiming to resolve a given real-world situation. Professionals will help students to understand the reality and complexity associated with land management decisions as they draw up a comprehensive decision plan in consultation. Groups will reach consensus and present their decision to the class during finals week.

Formats & Assignments:
Synchronous:
- Working Groups will be paired with a professional from SAF, ACF or the Forest Stewards Guild who will provide the situational groundwork for the final group project. Meetings will take place via video conference, full attendance and participation is required.
- Group-members will begin a proposal outline on a shared platform, progress will be monitored by the instructor as it progresses with input from all group-members. Timeline for completion of this outline will be provided.
- Small group discussions via video conferencing will review “Talk of the Trade” readings.
Reading:
• This recurring Talk of the Trade unit requires that students read a full length paper, column or essay from a resource management related publication (popular and peer reviewed are acceptable) or that they participate in a webinar on a related subject (SAF, Forest Stewards Guild, university extension program offerings). Students should be prepared to present a detailed overview of the reading including how it relates to the proposal outline/final project.

MODULE/WEEK 9. In an 1893 essay Pinchot advocates for the “sound forest management” of a 40,000 acre tract in the Adirondack’s Hamilton County wherein he describes “reckless cutting” as particularly destructive to Adirondack forests. He goes on to talk of proper handling and the “productive power” of a woodlot properly managed and harvested over time.

Formats & Assignments:
• Asynchronous: Respond in writing to section-topic prompts in Blackboard that are related to the weekly required readings and make substantive comment on posts made by a classmate from a different discussion group.
• Synchronous: Weekly class/small group discussions via video conferencing will review the assigned readings and concepts.
• Synchronous: Group-members will continue work on a proposal outline on a shared platform, progress will be monitored by the instructor as it progresses with input from all group-members. Timeline for completion of this outline will be provided.

Reading:

MODULE/WEEK 10. We will a focus here on the second half of Leopold's 1923 essay wherein he makes conservation a moral concern and in doing so he provides an opening into the writing of a Trappist Monk (Module 11) who, from a small shack leaking rain on the grounds of an Abbey in Kentucky, draws these various perspectives on the land if not together, at least into a larger question that remains hopeful, contested and open today.

Formats & Assignments:
• Asynchronous: Respond in writing to section-topic prompts in Blackboard that are related to the weekly required readings and make substantive comment on posts made by a classmate from a different discussion group.
• Synchronous: Weekly class/small group discussions via video conferencing will review the assigned readings and concepts.
• Synchronous: Group-members will meet again with their assigned professional via video conference to share their begin a proposal and revise as recommended.

Reading:

MODULE/WEEK 11. Thomas Merton's collection Raids on the Unspeakable includes a meditation into how we might hold these visions of forestry together in praise of this wild and natural world, a meaningless festival of rhythms, of rain and birdsong.

Formats & Assignments:
• Asynchronous: Respond in writing to section-topic prompts in Blackboard that are related to the weekly required readings and make substantive comment on posts made by a classmate from a different discussion group.
• Synchronous: Weekly class/small group discussions via video conferencing will review the assigned readings and concepts.
• Synchronous: Group-members will meet via video conference to advance their final project and continue to meet project deadlines TBA.

Reading:

MODULE/WEEK 12. Here Pinchot’s warning against “idle lands” comes into conversation with two essays advocating for the apparent flipside of that ideology in Wilderness designations on public lands.

Formats & Assignments:
• Asynchronous: Respond in writing to section-topic prompts in Blackboard that are related to the weekly required readings and make substantive comment on posts made by a classmate from a different discussion group.
• Synchronous: Class/small group discussions via video conferencing will review the assigned readings and concepts.

Reading:

MODULE/WEEK 13. The following essay from Leopold serves as a useful counterpoint or complement to Pinchot’s deep reliance on forest management for the purpose of economic and social security. In Leopold’s hands, the forest becomes less a matter of human utility and valuing, more a question of community and ecological responsibility.

Formats & Assignments:
• Asynchronous: Respond in writing to section-topic prompts in Blackboard that are related to the weekly required readings and make substantive comment on posts made by a classmate from a different discussion group.
• Synchronous: Class/small group discussions via video conferencing will review the assigned readings and concepts.

Reading:

MODULE/WEEK 14. Introduction to the basic elements of rhetorical technique including how to identify them and how to use them effectively in the final presentation. This introduction will help students transition from identifying where the tensions lie within a situation (ethics), to deciding how to proceed and persuade others to follow (rhetoric). To demonstrate we will focus on the elements of each group project/scenario and students will decide how to integrate the elements of rhetorical persuasion into their presentations. Students will develop a familiarity with rhetorical style such that it can be of use in the daily interactions that they will find themselves in on the job. Whether this amounts to an increased awareness of their own ethical biases, an improved ability to identify the preferences of others with whom they are in opposition or a new capacity for critical thinking and problem solving based on the twofold strength of practical ethics and rhetorical theory.

Formats & Assignments:
• Synchronous: Class/small group discussions via video conferencing will review the assigned readings and concepts and how to implement rhetorical technique into their final project/presentation.
Reading:

**MODULE/WEEK 15. FINAL.** Students will integrate the content and ethical approaches learned throughout the semester with situations provided by professional foresters in a written report meant to resolve the given real-world situations. Professionals will help students to understand the reality and complexity associated with land management decisions as they draw up a comprehensive plan together. Groups will reach consensus and present their decision to the class which will then open their resolution, methods etc. up for further discussion and possible revision.

**Format:** Final group presentations via video conferencing, presentation schedules and requirements TBA, full attendance and participation is required.