Course outline
This course uses a geographical political ecology lens to interrogate conflicts (broadly defined) between people and institutions over natural resources, in both developed and developing world contexts. The course will first review the literature on political ecology as an explanatory framework by tracing out its intellectual genealogy and outlining some of the current approaches and perspectives utilized in this subfield. Next, we will critique traditional approaches to the study of natural resources related conflicts. The remainder of the course will rely on theoretical and empirical studies, which help to unveil the complexities associated with conflict environments. Seven specific themes will be addressed in two parts. The first part concentrates on political ecological approaches to the study of environmental commodities and (violent) conflict and encompasses: (1) population, resource scarcity and green security, and (2) conflict commodities and extractive natural resources (oil, diamonds, forests, and water). The second part of the course probes deeper into the social and political aspects of environmental conflicts and specifically examines: (3) gender & the environment; (4) land, culture & identity; (5) climate change; (6) food security, and; (7) conflicts between people and protected areas.

Course prerequisites
There are no prerequisites but it is assumed that students have a working knowledge of where places are located and have the ability to find out if they do not. This is a class that is primarily intended for Masters and PhD students who are focused on research. It is theoretically heavy and draws on multiple epistemological approaches to the study of people and the environment.

Course format
Classes are discussion-oriented and draw heavily on readings from the literature (both the required and in some cases, the supplemental readings). Discussions will be led by students and will follow a “chalk talk” format in which one student gives a presentation on background concepts related to the papers for the day and a second student will prepare a handout with an agenda for discussion. Presentations should be less than 15 minutes and cannot use PowerPoint or other computer aids – if diagrams need to be shown, they should be drawn on the blackboard. For these presentations, you can draw on textbooks, Wikipedia (although with the usual cautions), and other general sources. Handouts should be distributed in class, and should include a list of 3-5 discussion questions or discussion points. Material for the handouts can be drawn from the readings (e.g. key figures) or from other sources. Usually two students will work together for a particular week, and will trade off the roles of presenter and handout-developer for the two discussion sessions for that week. All students are expected to do the readings and to be ready to discuss them in class.
**Academic Misconduct**
Students are advised to thoroughly examine the student advocacy and judicial affairs website to understand what is meant by academic misconduct. The website can be accessed from here (http://www.rackham.umich.edu/policies/academic_and_professional_integrity/).

**Course readings**

Additional readings (required): Will be provided as needed as pdf files on CANVAS

Textbook (Required):
   *Also available as an ebook

Textbooks (Supplementary):

**Readings Responses**
A critical component of graduate education is the gain the ability to thoughtfully read and critique academic works as well as to formalize these critiques in a written form. To help you achieve this goal, you will be required to write a two to four page response to the readings each week interval. You will post these responses to the CANVAS —Discussion section at preset due dates. During the end of each class period the instructor will provide a preview of the following assignment. It is important to develop and refine your own ideas as part of these responses in preparation for the final (term) paper.

**Term Paper and Research Proposal**
A major component of this class is a research paper. This will involve posing an interesting question related to political ecology, environmental security and conflict, and then setting out to answer this question through library research (in some cases you may want to examine existing datasets on conflict, such as those related to climate change or human rights). You will be graded based on the content presented in the paper as well as organization, clarity, citations, etc. A number of intermediary due dates will be established, to help you along with the paper. The research paper should not exceed 20 double-spaced pages.

1. **Research Proposal and Bibliography (2 to 5 pages) - Due (to me) Friday October 14 at 5:00pm (10 % of Final Grade)**
   - This will entail posing an interesting problem or question related to ‘conflict’ and the ‘environment’ both of which are broadly defined.
   - Topics should be related to your on-going career and research interests
   - A tentative outline should provide you with the starting point for your investigations. This outline should be similar to the structure you have followed in previous papers (Introduction -> research question -> Literature Review -> Methods -> Study area/Region -> Results/discussions -> Conclusions
   - You will then provide a list of references from which you will draw on to either support a line of argument or to refute a particular dominant narratives
   - Should be built on themes which we have been addressing as part of the class
   - Be sure to sketch out preliminary diagrams and/or figures that illustrate conceptual models or networks of actor interactions
3. Peer Review of Paper Draft - Due (to reviewers) Sunday November 27 at 5:00pm (10 % of Final Grade)

Peer Review Exercise:
A peer review exercise will be conducted to help you strengthen the structure and execution of your term paper. You will receive comments from at least three other class members (and you, in turn will provide three students with feedback). The modalities of this exercise will be discussed on the first day of class and a guideline sheet will be prepared to help you organize your critiques as part of the peer review process. More information will be provided as the semester progresses.

- The research question should be clearly spelt out (i.e. the purpose of this paper is to...)
- You will then set about out to answer this question through library research, and in some instances, the analysis of relevant data sets.
- The scope and intent of the investigation in the paper must also be clearly delineated as well as any supporting analytical and theoretical frameworks
- More fully fleshed out narrative emanating from the proposal
- Should be properly structured
- Should rely on evidence from secondary sources (either journal articles) or existing datasets
- Methods should be clearly delineated
- Papers should be organized, written clearly and free of errors.
- All sources used in preparing your paper as well as references for supporting maps, figures and tables, must be cited, including data sources.
- Use standard citation and presentation forms (e.g., Kate Turabian’s Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations)
- Paper should ideally be innovative and build on lines of investigation, which are new and novel. They should provide a good counter-narrative to dominant discourses of conflicts over natural resources.
- Paper should also try and stay away from using ‘straw-person’ arguments (for example, commonly citing neo-Malthusian and apolitical explanations). Rather the paper should expand on existing literatures, which have already demonstrated that these explanations are less accurate and imprecise. Your work should seek to move these conversations forward without necessarily grounding it in, for example, Neo-Malthusian narratives.
- Should be as detailed as possible
- Peer review sessions will occur outside of class hours
- The guiding principles for a useful peer review are as follows: 1) engage at the level of ideas; 2) back up your comments with specific examples from the draft; and 3) be precise when giving advice.
- Comments should revolve around: (1) structure, and; (2) execution.
- You will prepare two sets of written evaluation: (1) confidential comments to the ‘editor’ (me); (2) blind comments to the author. These should be e-mailed to me (bilalb@umich.edu) by the due date.
- The peer review exercise will be double blind. I.e. you do not know who is writing the paper and the author of the paper will not know who the reviewer is.
- You will provide a rating out of 5 (5 being a high rating and 1 a low rating)

4. Final Paper (no more than 20 double spaced pages excluding references) - Due (to me) Friday December 09 @ 5:00 pm (30 % of Final Grade)

- The paper should be a polished, clear and concise product. Don't BS your way through the paper – I will know!
- Should also significantly incorporate changes from the project draft and peer review
- Final format should be similar to a journal which you would ideally like your work published in

Finally, I will not tolerate late submissions, unless there are extenuating circumstances.
Grading
Seminar Participation: 10%
Discussion Leadership: 10%
Readings Responses (3 in total): 30%
Research Proposal and Bibliography: 10%
Peer Review of Paper Draft 10%
Final Paper: 30%
Total: 100%

Final grades are based on a total percentage for the term. Grade cutoff points (in terms of percentages) are as follows: A+ (100%), A (95.00 to 99.99%), A- (90.00 to 94.99%), B+ (87.00 to 89.99%), B (83.00 to 86.99%), B- (80.00 to 82.99%), C+ (77.00 to 79.99%), C (73.00 to 86.99%), C- (70.00 to 72.99%), D+ (67.00 to 69.99%), D (63.00 to 66.99%), D- (60.00 to 62.99%), E (50.00 to 59.99%), F (40.00 to 49.99%).

*Tentative Schedule
* Note that during the course it is possible that some of the topics and readings will have their dates changed, or contents altered. I will try to provide as much advance warning of changes as possible.

PART I: POLITICAL ECOLOGY AS A CONCEPTUAL & ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Week 1: Course Overview and What is Political Ecology I?

Monday Sep 12  
*Course Overview and Introduction to Political Ecology*

Required Readings

Supplementary

Week 2: What is Policy Ecology II?

Monday Sep 19  *The Critical Tools of Political Ecology*

Required Readings
Supplementary

   (Note: Please also read the commentary [by Michael Watts and Nick Middleton] and author response [by Piers Blaikie] in the 'Classics in Human Geography Revisited')

**Week 3:**

**What is Political Ecology III?**

Monday Sep 26

*Challenges in Ecology, Social Construction & Explanation*

Required Readings


Supplementary


**Week 4:**

**What is Political Ecology IV?**

**Monday Oct 03**  
*Degradation & Marginalization, Conservation & Control, Environmental Conflict, etc.*

**Required Readings:**


**Supplementary**

Monday Oct 03  

**Reading Response 1 Due (Post on CANVAS AND as a hardcopy to Bilal)**

**PART II: POLITICAL ECOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF ENVIRONMENTAL COMMODITIES AND (VIOLENT) CONFLICT**

**Week 5: Population, Resource Scarcity & Green Security**

**Monday Oct 10**  

*Neo-Malthusian and apolitical explanations of population & scarcity*

**Required Readings (First Half):**


**Supplementary**


**Political-Ecological Explanations**

**Required Readings (Second Half):**


**Supplementary:**


**RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND BIBLIOGRAPHY (2TO 5 PAGES) - DUE (TO ME) FRIDAY OCTOBER 14 AT 5:00PM**
Week 6: NO CLASS (FALL BREAK)

Monday Oct 17 No Class (Fall Break)

Week 7: Conflict Commodities (Oil)

Monday Oct 24 The Political Ecology/Economy of War

Required Readings (First Half):


Supplementary


Petro violence

Required Readings (Second Half):


Supplementary


Monday Oct 24  **Reading Response 2 Due (Post on CANVAS)**

**Week 8: Conflict Commodities (Diamonds & Other Gems)**

**Monday Oct 31  **Gems: A Resource Curse?**

**Required Readings (First Half): Conceptual Approaches**


**Supplementary**


**Required Readings (Second Half): Certification & Commodity Chains**


**Supplementary**


**Week 9: Conflict Commodities (Forests)**

**Monday Nov 07**

**Required Readings (First Half): Forest exploitation in the developing world**


**Required Readings (Second Half)**

*The Politics (and life) of Forests in the developed world*


**Supplementary**


**Week 10:** **Conflict Commodities (Water)**

**Monday Nov 14**

**Required Readings (First Half):** *Case studies from the Global South*


**Supplementary**


**Required Readings (Second Half):** *Case studies from the developed world*


**Supplementary**


**PART III: PROBING DEEPER INTO THE SOCIAL & POLITICAL ASPECTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICTS**

**Week 11: Gender & Environmental Conflict**

**Monday Nov 21**

**Required Readings (First Half): Gendered Dimension of Environmental Conflicts**


**Supplementary**


**Required Readings (Second Half): Gender Politics and Land/Livelihood Conflicts**


**Supplementary**


Monday Nov 21

**Reading Response 3 Due (Post on CANVAS)**

**PEER REVIEW OF PAPER DRAFT - DUE (TO REVIEWERS) SUNDAY NOVEMBER 27 AT 5:00PM (10 % OF FINAL GRADE)**

**Week 12: Climate Change & Environmental Conflict**

Monday Nov 28

**Required Readings (First and Second Half):**

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**Supplementary**


**Week 13**  
**Food, Security & Environmental Conflict**

**Monday Dec 5**

**Required Readings (first Half)**  
*Neoliberalism and Food Security*


**Supplementary**


**Required Readings (Second Half)**  
*Land Grabs and Accumulation by Dispossession*


**Supplementary**


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**Week 14:** Conservation Conflicts

Monday Dec 12

**Required Readings (First Half): Developed World Case Studies**


**Final Reading (Required)**


**Epilogue (supplementary)**


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**Supplementary**


