Conservation and Preservation
Curt Meine

The prior seminar sessions by Andrew, Peter, and Karen will have already raised key questions involving historical perspectives on human agency within ecosystems. Over the last two decades this discourse has broadened and intensified. A wide array of disciplines—including ecologists, conservation biologists, anthropologists, environmental historians, historians of science, and science writers—have converged within a contested space of jostling and synthesizing narratives. The adoption (not yet fully accepted) of the Anthropocene and novel ecosystems as organizing concepts in the environmental sciences and humanities reflects the increasingly evident reality of long-standing and pervasive human influence on natural systems.

This has obvious but uncertain implications for the practice of biodiversity conservation, ecological restoration, agriculture, and other applied fields. The experience of accelerated rates and increasing scales of environmental, social, and technological change has brought about contentious times in conservation. At the heart of this, I believe, is a struggle to comprehend social and environmental change, and to understand just how we situate ourselves within nested scales of time and space.

One key manifestation of this struggle, in turn, revolves around the very definition of conservation, and its relation to “traditional” nature preservation efforts. This is an old debate, now with a new twist. We’ll explore the evolving narratives of conservation history related to this theme, especially as it relates to the ethics of protecting, managing, and sustaining populations and ecosystems.

Readings


Suggested further readings


Keim, B. 2014. The Earth is not a garden. AEON (September 18). [https://aeon.co/essays/giving-up-on-wilderness-means-a-barren-future-for-the-earth](https://aeon.co/essays/giving-up-on-wilderness-means-a-barren-future-for-the-earth)


