Environmental History is a relatively new historical discipline dedicated to understanding how our surroundings have influenced our choices and how we have affected our surroundings. Until very recently, history has treated the physical environment of continents, rivers, soils, and climates as a backdrop for political, social, or cultural action. Sometimes a colorful background, but not often a factor in the action taking place in the foreground. At its most basic, Environmental History makes three claims. First, we are influenced by our environments. Second, we change our environments. Third, our knowledge of and attitudes toward our environment change. In this course we’ll look at American History using each of these ideas and see things we wouldn’t have seen otherwise. Prerequisite(s): Junior/Senior status or consent of instructor.
D. LEARNING OUTCOMES (General)

1. explain how the physical environment of the Americas shaped the experiences and the choices of people living here and how specific societies and cultures applied their own ideas and world-views in understanding and reacting to their environments.

2. illustrate both the ways people have adapted to their environments and the ways they have changed them throughout our history.

3. summarize the environmental challenges posed by human actions and the effects of changes in common rights to resources, externalities, and unanticipated consequences.

4. identify the choices people have made that have impacted the environment and the range of other choices that existed and still exist, even when these are not highlighted in traditional historical narratives.

5. assess and articulate how choices made in the past relate to challenges we face today and choices we may be called to make in the future.

6. (for grad students) formulate an Environmental History module to a high school or undergraduate audience.

E. Minnesota Transfer Curriculum Goal Area(s) and Competencies

None

F. LEARNER OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

As noted on course syllabus

G. SPECIAL INFORMATION

None noted