

LAW 6936: Biodiversity Law

Spring 2026 Syllabus
Tuesdays: 10:00 – 12:00 PM
Classroom: HOL 355A

Contact Information

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Office Hours: M/W 3-4

Course Description

This course examines the legal mechanisms used for the conservation of biological diversity, with a particular focus on wildlife. The course will largely focus on domestic federal statutes and state regulations, though we will briefly touch on tribal and international law. We will discuss the English common law origins of wildlife law and track the myriad ways in which the law has evolved to align with changes in cultural attitudes towards biodiversity. We will specifically discuss complicated questions related to the nature of biodiversity, our reasons for protecting biodiversity, the appropriate legal guardians of biodiversity, and the methods that are appropriate for conservation. Topics will include: ownership and property rights in wildlife; state game laws; tribal wildlife management; constitutional limitations on management; invasive species; novel tools for conservation; international law and wildlife trafficking; and major federal statutes such as the Endangered Species Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act, the Wild Free Roaming Horses and Burros Act, among others.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

- Students will gain knowledge and substantive understanding of the general legal framework of biodiversity conservation
- Students will develop an appreciation for the different roles of federal and state judiciaries, legislatures, and agencies in formulating and implementing biodiversity law and policy
- Students will gain a grounding in the science of conservation biology and better understand the distinct role that both science and societal values play in the development of biodiversity law
- Students will be able to partake meaningfully in the major ongoing debates in the field of biodiversity law
- Students will develop their skills in researching, interpreting, criticizing, and applying federal wildlife statutes and state regulations
- Students will be able to effectively communicate legal reasoning and analysis orally in class
- Students will draft a substantial research paper on a topic related to biodiversity law

Course Book and Materials

There is no assigned course book. Reading materials will be assigned for each class period. These materials will be available online via Canvas. I will rely heavily on Canvas to disseminate readings and other information. Daily reading assignments and a list of topics to be covered are provided in the linked schedule below.

Grades

Your grade in this course will be determined based on the following:

- Research paper (75%)
- Student teaching (10%)
- Class participation (15%)

Research Paper – 75%

Your research paper will make up 75% of your grade for the class. The final paper will be worth 60% of your overall grade. Your topic proposal will be worth 5% of your grade. Your rough draft will be worth 5% of your grade. Your peer editing of your classmates' papers will also be worth 5%.

Paper topics must be submitted via the portal on Canvas by Tuesday March 3. The paper topic proposal should be 2-3 paragraphs with a description of the topic, a proposed thesis, and at least four to five references.

A draft of your paper must be submitted to both me and your classmates by April 14. Each student will peer edit 2 other papers. On April 21 we will use the class period to discuss the peer edits.

Final course papers will be due via the portal on Canvas by the assigned date. Late papers will not be accepted. The final course paper will satisfy the advanced writing requirement and must be a substantial writing of at least 25 pages (double-spaced, including footnotes) of 12-point font that involves independent research and legal analysis and addresses a legal topic related to biodiversity law. Papers should set forth a clear argument supported with well-reasoned analysis and sufficient references. Papers will be graded based on factors including clarity, organization, sophistication, use of references, and overall formatting. I am happy to read multiple drafts as long as you give me enough time to get your paper back to you.

Student Teaching – 10%

Ten percent of your grade will be based on your assigned student teaching day. Each week, with a few exceptions, the final 30 minutes of the class will be reserved for student teaching. Students will be placed in small groups and will be expected to lead the class during that period. Each group will pick a topic related to the subject of the class period they are assigned. Each group can assign readings to go along with their discussion. Groups will be expected to submit their chosen topic and readings **before class the week prior** to their teaching session. I am happy to consult and make suggestions on topics, but I will leave the final decision up to your group. I will send around a survey to determine groups and post those groups on Canvas after the first class.

Class Participation – 15%

Fifteen percent of your grade will be based on class participation. My expectation is that you will be physically present for each and every class. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class. If you will miss class entirely, you will need prior approval (see pass policy below). Each missed class without approval will result in a loss of 5% of your overall grade. Missing three or more classes will result in a failing grade.

This course is designed to run as a seminar. As such, discussions, rather than lecturing, will dominate class sessions. Class participation therefore requires more than simply showing up to class. I will routinely ask for participation and will not hesitate to cold call students if necessary. Coming to class prepared involves having done the assigned readings and participating insightfully in discussions.

Pass Days

Each student may take up to 2 passes over the course of the semester without penalty. A pass can be used in two different ways. A pass may be used to miss class entirely. Alternatively, if you pass on a day where you attend class, I will not call on you or expect you to have read the material. You can use a pass for any reason – you do not need to explain yourself. To use a pass to avoid being called on, you just need to send me an email more than one hour before the start of class. If you are using your pass to miss class, you need to email me in advance if possible. If you find yourself seriously ill or if you have something come up that will impact your regular attendance to class, please reach out to me and we can find a solution that will work for everyone.

Office Hours

I intend to hold both physical and virtual office hours. Office hours will be determined on the first day of class. I will update this section of the syllabus at that time. If the chosen times do not work for you, please reach out to me via email. I am always happy to meet you outside of these hours.

I will be physically available in my office (HOL 337) during that time, but I will also be available via Zoom during this window. For Zoom, I will use a virtual waiting room, and it will be first come, first served (unless you have a scheduled appointment). I am also available outside of these windows by appointment.

The office hour zoom information is posted both here and on Canvas:
<https://ufl.zoom.us/j/99463502400?pwd=7PmE27bf5biaMX3EACfSYthIjpIlGK.1>

Meeting ID: 994 6350 2400

Passcode: Office26

Additionally, I am requiring every student to come to my office hours at least once during the semester. Failure to attend office hours at least once will result in a forfeit of 50% of your participation points.

Pedagogical research supports the idea that students that come to office hours tend to do better in their courses. Research also suggests that students that would benefit the most from attending office hours are the least likely to attend. I want you to feel comfortable reaching out to me, asking

questions, and attending office hours. I am here to be a resource for you in whatever capacity you might need. I understand that my class, and law school as a whole, is just one part of your life, and I understand that life happens. Just know that I am here to chat about biodiversity law, law school, or anything else you think I can help you with.

Online Tools

Canvas is our main digital platform, and I will use Canvas to disseminate relevant information for the course. Lecture slides and other materials will be posted on Canvas. Due to scheduling conflicts, class might occasionally be pre-recorded and moved onto Canvas. Additionally, class may occasionally be held remotely over Zoom. If there is a reason we need to hold class remotely, I will post that to Canvas, send an email, and remind students in the previous class.

UF Levin College of Law Standard Syllabus Policies

Other information about UF Levin College of Law policies can be found at [this link](#).

UF Academic Policies and Resources

Other information about UF academic policies and resources can be found at [this link](#).

Compliance with UF Honor Code

Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. Students should be sure that they understand the UF Law Honor Code located [here](#). The UF Law Honor Code also prohibits use of artificial intelligence, including, but not limited to, ChatGPT and Harvey, to assist in completing quizzes, exams, papers, or other assessments unless expressly authorized by the professor to do so.

ABA Policy

Per American Bar Association Rule 310, a “credit hour” is “an amount of work that reasonably approximates: (1) not less than one hour of classroom time or direct faculty instruction and two hours of out-of-class student work per week for fifteen weeks, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time.” As this is a 2-credit course, you are required to spend at least four hours per week, on average, outside of class studying. This is in addition to the two hours a week we spend in class.

Course Schedule and Readings

I keep a live, updated schedule on Google Sheets. You should **always** refer to the live Google Sheets schedule for the most up-to-date information on class readings. The link to that schedule is [here](#).

Class coverage may be faster or slower than these specific assignments; assignments may be modified in the interest of student learning or based on coverage considerations.

Readings for Week 1

- “Biodiversity: A Primer on Science, Values, and Policy” Chapter

- *Almond All. of California v. Fish & Game Comm'n*, 79 Cal. App. 5th 337, 299 Cal. Rptr. 3d 9 (2022)
- *Tennessee Valley Authority v. Hill*, 437 U.S. 153 (1978)
- Reed Noss, *Some principles of Conservation Biology, as They Apply to Environmental Law*, 69 Chicago-Kent L.R. 893 (1994)

Edited versions of each will be posted on Canvas and distributed to the students prior to the start of the semester.