

The Nation-State and the Transnational Environment
April 16-18, 2009
UT Campus

The conference will consist of seven panels. The first session, on the afternoon of April 16, will feature presentations by four outstanding graduate students at the University of Texas at Austin working in the general area of international environmental history. That evening, the conference will formally kick off with a keynote address by John McNeill, professor of history at Georgetown University and one of the world's leading environmental historians. His lecture, entitled "The Environmental History of the Cold War, 1945-????," will consider both the disastrous environmental legacies of the Cold War and the halting efforts by nation-states to cooperate in the environmental field during that era.

On April 17 and 18, the conference will move on to its central agenda — four panels that will explore our general theme from four different angles. The first of these sessions will lay the groundwork for what follows by examining how nation-states have established or expanded their sovereignty through control over nature and natural resources. How, in short, has the process of nation-building been connected to the process of drawing boundaries through features of the natural environment that often defy easy division? The next three panels consider how nation-states have confronted problems created by the artificiality and permeability of those very boundaries. One panel will examine the behavior of nation-states with respect to environmental toxins such as DDT and Agent Orange. Another will take up similar questions with respect to migratory wildlife, and a third will examine national policymaking regarding water resources.

Finally, the conference will culminate a "roundtable" that will shift our attention from the past to the present and future. In this session, two non-historians — that is, Sierra Club President J. Robert Cox and Forest Ethics co-founder Tzeporah Berman — will reflect on the earlier panels and attempt to draw out the larger significance of those sessions for dealing with pressing contemporary problems. In this way, we hope to tease out the unexplored lessons of history for coping with challenges that are too often viewed as fundamentally new in human experience.

Sponsored by the Institute for Historical Studies

To request a copy of the program, full conference statement, or poster please email: historyinstitute@austin.utexas.edu