

Environmental Economics 4535 and 4545

First assignment wrt your paper topic

It is time to start thinking about a topic for your paper, what you might want to read in preparation, and an outline. This is the first a number of assignments leading up to your paper for the course.

I am fairly flexible about what constitutes a paper, with the provision that it has economic and environmental content. It could be a project of some sort, and it could be a group endeavor. A project might be the development of a web page that looks a some natural resource or environmental issue from an economic perspective. What is important to me is to see that you have taken the theory you have learned in class and can apply it to gain insight into some environmental problem or issue that is of interest to you. For example, choose a natural resource or environmental market failure that interests you, explain why the market failed, and suggest policies for improving the situation. I want to see you thinking like an economist. A profusion of footnotes and references is not necessary, but it is important to properly reference your sources, including web pages.

Please identify a proposed topic, or topics. Describe your topic in a paragraph or two, and, as part of that description, briefly explain why the topic is relevant to a course in environmental economics. How would one describe your topic in economic jargon? As part of this assignment, you might note for me the those sections of your text that are relevant to your topic.

Please limit this assignment to no more than two pages.

A few recommendations:

Make sure your topic has economic content.

While the paper does not require extensive references, discuss what materials you might want to read and topics you will want to research before you begin your paper. I am particularly concerned that you learn the appropriate economic theory for the topic you choose.

Make your topic specific rather than general. For example, don't write about logging on Forest Service Land, but rather write about logging in a specific National Forest and/or logging a specific stand such as old growth. Don't write about the benefits and costs of ski area development in general terms, but rather some specific aspect of some proposed development.

Develop a research plan and then start to carry it out. For readings, start with your text. The text won't have much, for example, on ski area development, but it will have a lot of the relevant theory. Find out if there is a EIS (environmental impact statement) for the problem you are considering, and try to obtain it.

Be wary of your ability to measure the benefits and costs of some action. You cannot do it in the scope of a term paper. Rather, what you can do is discuss what some of the benefits of costs might be, and discuss how one might try to measure one of them.

Is your topic related to the allocation of resources? If so, make this clear.

If the intent of your paper is to isolate on and discuss some specific market failure, such a mine tailings in the Arkansas river, discuss possible corrections from both an efficiency, equity and political feasibility perspective.

I am particularly fond of papers/projects on local issues. Thousands of papers will be written on global warming, maybe only one, yours, will be about the impact of the parking fees in Boulder Mountain parks. With a local issue you are the only one investigating it from an economic perspective, and you have the opportunity to talk to the people involved. With local issues, the details often jump out, forcing you to be accomodate to real world considerations.

Some interesting papers in the past have been on such topics as: "Do We Really Need Bighorn Sheep," "The Economics of Whaling," "The Economics of Outer Space," "Recycling," "The Love Canal," "The Harp Seal Hunt," "Wilderness Management," "Boulder Mountain Parks," "Deforestation," "Regulating Mountain Biking," "Ski Area Development," "Two Forks Dam," "Management in the Holy Cross Wilderness area," "Vasquez: The Proposed Expansion of Winter Park," "Oxygenated Fuels and the Front Range," "Rafting on the Arkansas," Boulder Open space," Wood-burning Stoves," hunting and fishing in Colorado, etc.

Some papers by students in 4545 and 4535 can be found on th 4535 web page.
<<http://spot.Colorado.EDU/~morey/4535/4535stud.html>>

The syllabus for 4535 and 4545 (on the 4545 web page) are both good sources for paper topics.

Keep in mind that you will likely not have the resources or time to do a complete study. For example, you will not be able to estimate the benefits and costs of some ski area development. Rather a good paper on this topic would discuss how one might measure such benefits and costs if one had the time and resources. It might, for example, develop a survey instrument.