

International Wildlife Law: Class Description and Syllabus
Professor Erica Thorson
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Class Overview

This class attempts to bridge academic legal disciplines and practice areas—namely international environmental law and animal law—and attempts to do so in a way that explores both the theoretical and the pragmatic underpinnings of both disciplines to better understand the politics, principles, and legal outcomes in the arena of international wildlife law. International wildlife law is rarely taught from the perspectives of both disciplines, but the animal rights and welfare movements have influenced significantly the development of international wildlife law and there continues to be room for further influence. In addition, in international fora, much like in local contexts, wildlife conservation activists and friendly governments must balance their interests with those who advocate for exploiting wildlife for the sake of poverty eradication, development, or subsistence needs.

This class will examine a number of international wildlife treaties in-depth, considering the theoretical, practical, and legal bases of each and exploring the compromises that make up such a significant portion of international law. But first, we will discuss some of the most important theories underlying the animal law movement and international environmental law, considering throughout the course how these theories manifest as negotiating positions. We will also begin with a brief overview of international lawmaking by treaty.

Ultimately, I hope you leave this class with a greater understanding and appreciation for the complexity of international lawmaking, specifically in the wildlife context, and with a greater sense of awareness of the negotiations that give rise to the balancing acts and compromises that make up international wildlife law. I hope that by the end of class, you have a set of tools to critically examine the utility of the compromises the international community has struck and to think creatively about ways to improve the international management of wildlife so that it serves reasonably and justly the interests of both the animals and the humans who depend on them.

Class Expectations

This class is labeled an “intensive” for a reason: it will be intense. We meet for three hours a day, for nine days over the course of two weeks, and the workload will be demanding. I expect you to be prepared for class every day, and I expect everyone to participate in class every day. Only with class participation will this be a dynamic, interesting class. These issues beg discussion, and I hope we have a number of informed, spirited discussions. Given the two-week time-frame, I do not expect anyone to miss class.

Grading

Your final grade comprises your grades on four in-class assignments, including a negotiation-prep document due at the beginning of each in-class assignment, plus your class participation grade. Each in-class negotiation is worth twenty percent, as is class participation. We will not take an exam in this class.

Each in class assignment is structured to be a practical application of class materials. Pedagogically, this approach is more satisfying than a standard exam, for two reasons. First, we learn better through active learning, and, second, international wildlife law is a living complex beast comprising nation-States, scientists, NGOs, and the animals themselves. Only through practical application can we really tease out and see in how complex international wildlife negotiations can be. It also allows us to think more deeply about the central themes and principles and to apply them in context. Your participation in each in-class exercise will be graded based on research and preparation, presentation, quality of analysis, collaboration, critical thinking, and effort. As I introduce each in-class assignment, I will be clear about what I will be looking for and which factors I will grade.

Office Hours

I will be in my office most afternoons; I am happy to answer questions at any time. If my door is closed, it is likely just because I have my dog in my office. Just knock and come on in.

Readings

I have only included the first week or so of readings in your packet. The pages are not numbered—my apologies—but a sheet of coral paper divides each day's assignment. I will pass out the readings for the second week in class.

June 22 - Introductory Issues

June 23 – Intro to International Law / Principles and Themes of International Wildlife Law

June 24 – Continue Principles/ Precautionary Principle In-Class Assignment

June 25 – International Convention of the Regulation of Whaling

June 26 – IWC Negotiation In-Class Assignment