



## ENVIRONMENTAL FLUID DYNAMICS

In collaboration  
with

## ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE INITIATIVE

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Department of Civil &  
Environmental Engineering  
& Earth Sciences

Present a seminar

### *Communicating controversial environmental science: reporting on the paradigm shift in conservation biology.*

*Emma Marris*

***Date:** Tuesday, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012*

***Time:** 11:00-12:00 noon*

***Place:** Engineering Dean's Boardroom, 258 Fitzpatrick Hall*

### *Abstract*

After years of reporting on conservation biology and ecology for the journal *Nature*, I found that a paradigm shift was happening in conservation. Findings from paleoecology, archeology and other fields were increasingly dismantling a popular idea of ecosystems as very stable entities that were nearly static for thousands of years before the sudden impact of Europeans. On the contrary, ecosystems around the world were very dynamic on their own, and had been changing in response to human pressures ever since people arrived on the various continents. In North America, for example, the landscape as first seen by colonists was already highly anthropogenic. But without an easily identifiable “pristine wilderness” state to hold up as the goal, what should conservationists be aiming for? It is this question that currently preoccupies conservation as a field.

I'll talk about the process of writing about this moment in conservation, about how I researched the book and how I tried to bring the message to the general public, even though many conservationists worried that it was too complex and might lead to either hopelessness or a loss of conservation concern in my readers.