

Favorite Place Project

Purpose:

One of the primary motivators of students in forestry is a desire to understand and protect the special places that touch our hearts, whether they are the hills behind your home, a forest in a National Park, or a cherished river where you caught your first cutthroat trout. While we will be focusing our studies on phenomena applicable worldwide, it is important for you to gain a sense of the connections between these processes and the places you live.

During the semester you will write an essay on a *forested* landscape associated with a specific place with which you are familiar. Examples might include a specific area of Glacier National Park, the Upper Missouri River, a glacial cirque in the Rockies, a section of the Appalachian Trail, or a forest growing near your home town. This process will occur in 8 major steps outlined on the next few pages. In simple terms, you will begin by:

- (1) describing your place,
- (2) indicating why it is special to you and
- (3) what you know of its vegetation and history at the start of the course.

Over the course you will revise this initial essay and develop content specific knowledge in short writing stints for use in the final essay. The final essay will be your chance to revisit your favorite place with the new insights you will have gained through this course. In this final essay you will provide a more detailed and accurate analysis of the development of the trees in your site and on the processes continuing to act upon it to create its future.

This assignment is designed to get you thinking about how forestry (and especially Tree Biology) applies to a place that is meaningful to you and how the actions we humans take today will determine its future. It also provides a convenient way for you to track your learning in this course and gives you a chance to work on your writing, one of the most important skills needed by any college student or professional today. The overall strategy and time line for the assignment are laid out on the next page.

NOTE: Do not be overwhelmed by this activity!! In spite of the length of this handout, there are only two papers to write and five questions to answer outside of class. In fact, your **entire** project shouldn't be much longer than this handout! I am giving you a lot of details and a point breakdown to allow you to focus on the material itself, knowing clearly what I expect of you.

This assignment is based on a similar project for geology students developed by S. C. Moosavi while at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Stages of the Project

- | | |
|--|---|
| I. Choosing Your Site | Sept. 6 |
| II. Initial Essay – First Draft
Description of the Place, including picture(s) if possible
Personal Importance of the Favorite Place
Initial Impressions on Place Vegetation Development | DUE: Sept. 25 |
| III. Developing Topic Knowledge
Short Writing Segments
Questions From Class | Throughout
the semester
<i>Send via email</i> |
| IV. Peer Review of Initial Essay
Analyze Peer Initial Essays for Discussion
Discuss Analysis with Writer and Writing Group | Oct. 4 |
| V. Faculty Conference
Writer Discusses Feedback with Instructor by appointment
This is optional, but strongly encouraged. <i>If you sign up for an appointment and do not show up, I will deduct 5 points from your project grade!</i> | Oct. 9-11 |
| VI. Response to Feedback
Writers Respond to Peer and Faculty Feedback | DUE: Nov. 1 |
| VII. Revised Initial Essay
Writer Uses Feedback to Rewrite Initial Essay,
including picture(s) or diagram | DUE: Nov. 1 |
| VIII. Site Revisited Essay
Enlightened Views on Place Development
Threats to Favorite Place
Future of Favorite Place | DUE: Nov. 29 |

I. Choosing your site:

You must begin by choosing the place you wish to write about. This decision should not be taken lightly as a poor initial choice can make your work difficult. The place you choose should meet the following criteria:

- **Familiarity** – Your favorite place must be a REAL place on earth that is well known to you, and, in light of this class, it must be currently forested. (Sorry, Middle Earth, Narnia, and the forest moon of Endor are not eligible for this essay even though they are very special!). It need not be a place that you have spent years in, but you should know the place well enough that you can picture it in your mind and describe it accurately without struggling.
- **Size** – Your site must be neither too big nor too small. Choosing a tiny patch of ground such as your backyard may not give you much information to go on. Your site must have some features that you can think and write about. At the same time, it must not be too large. The Rocky Mountains are fantastic, but they contain many, many, many places that are affected by different processes. How can you narrow down the Rocky Mountains to a reasonable essay? A site that is just the right size lies in between these extremes. A particular river valley in your hometown or a specific forest in the Rockies might be a more realistic choice. Remember, the key to a good choice is a place that you can picture in your mind and describe to a stranger without having to give the person a menu of options within your site to select from.
- **Interest** – Your site must be “special.” The place must have features that interest you and are of value to you in some way. This will make your essay MUCH easier to write.

We will go through an example of such a place during the first or second day of class. After this discussion if you remain unsure about your choice of a site ask for advice.

II. Initial Essay (35 pts)

The initial version of the favorite place essay is your chance to describe your location, its importance to you and your current knowledge of its history and continuing evolution. Since parts of this may be difficult for you depending upon your choice of location and academic background, the information relating to the history and evolution of your site will be assessed as speculative for now. (These items are listed with an asterisk in the list of required information below.) Remember that I probably have never been to your favorite place, so you must help ME to see it as YOU do.

Pay attention to spelling and grammar as you write, for they impact the impression your work leaves. The essay should be about 3-4 typed pages (double spaced, font size = 11-12), **not** including the course topics page, pictures, or diagrams. Items with multiple points assigned to them will be assessed using the rubric described under assessment at the end of the assignment. You should be sure to write the essay as a UNIT, not as a list of answers to questions. (I am merely giving you guidance on what should be included.) **Please turn in 4 copies of the essay** (black & white copies are OK at this stage). These will be reviewed and returned to you with comments for improvement from the instructor and members of your writing group. **While this draft of the essay will not be graded *per se*, you may be penalized for late papers.**

Site Description & Importance

- Name of the general area (can be generic) and location of your site (this can include latitude and longitude but should also include town, state, and country as appropriate.) Include a digital copy of a map of the area surrounding your site. This can be any map that provides information on the location of your site and additional information as you deem important (e.g., Forest Service or National Park Service “Visitor Maps” [many can be downloaded]; topographic maps from the library or an on-line such as TOPOZONE). Be sure to print out enough of the map for the context of your site to show. A map from Google Earth may provide interesting aerial views of your site but may not show enough information about the context of your site. (5)
- General description of the topography, soil, presence of rivers, etc. (2)
- Specific description of the plants (with special attention to the trees!) and general description of the animals on the site. (3)
- General description of the climate of the area; include temperature, precipitation, etc. over the course of a typical year. Graphs may help you, but they do not replace a description within the text itself. (3)
- Make a diagram or include pictures if you have them to help me visualize your favorite place. (Note for pictures, please scan them as actual photographs can get lost in my office very easily.) (2)
- Why is this site important to you? (2)

Site Evolution *

- Discuss how your site may have looked in 1800 and how it may have changed in succeeding years. (4)
- How is the site used today? (Development is not required for a site to be in use!) (4)

Site Investigation *

- What questions do you have about your site that you would like answered in this course? (2)
- What topics in the course do you believe will help you to learn about your site? Answer this by checking off those lectures, which might offer information RELEVANT to answering the questions above about your site. (2)

Writing Mechanics

- Spelling and Grammar (3)
- Flow of the Writing (3)

Remember, this is the beginning of your investigation and will be assessed as such. The grade for this segment will not be given until the revision stage (Stage VII).

III. Developing Topic Knowledge: (25 pts total)

As we work through the various topics in this course, you will be asked to try to explain aspects of your site using this knowledge. This will also help you to do the analysis needed to write the Site Revisited Essay at the end of this course.

How will this work? On five (5) Tuesdays during the semester, you will be given a specific question to help you relate the information we have learned to your site. You will email this response to for240@ntsg.umt.edu by the following Thursday at 10:10 a.m. Some questions may be very specific, while others may be very general.

In general, you will state how the topic relates to or helps to explain some aspect of your favorite place. If it does not relate to your favorite place, explain why you believe this is so. The answers may surprise you. You will also have an opportunity to ask a question about any topic we have covered in class which you still do not understand. This will help me to know what items we need to review.

Each topic email is worth up to 5 points. You will receive an email reply with your grade and any comments, and the final points will be tallied at the end of the semester when all materials are due with the Site Revisited Essay. Keep a copy of your emails, you will need to turn them in with your Site Revisited Essay!

IV. Peer Review of Initial Essay: (12 pts)

We all improve our writing through practice and constructive feedback from others. To help you with this task, you will participate in a writing group. Students will be divided into groups of 3. Each student's essay will be reviewed by the members of the student's writing group, the TA, and the instructor.

How will this work? When the writing groups are assigned, copies of each member's essay will be given to each student in the group. Prior to discussion day (Oct. 4), each member of the writing group, the TA, and the instructor, will review the relevant the essays. Reviewers are encouraged to provide *positive and constructive* feedback on the writing and the analysis of the site. These comments should be written directly on each student's copy of the essay as you will be graded on the quality of your review. Bring these to class! During the in-class review, you will spend approximately 15 minutes on each of the three papers. The 2 reviewers will share their comments with the writer (both written and verbal) in a manner that is *constructive and helpful* to building both a better essay and a more thorough understanding of the particular location. This time should be used to gain outside opinions regarding both the writing and the interpretation of the place presented. The instructor will provide written feedback as well, although she cannot be a participant in all of the simultaneous discussions. Once the feedback has been shared, the writer will then be able to proceed to stage VI.

Each student will receive up to 6 points for reviewing each writing group member's essay. Points will be awarded based on the *quality* of feedback provided to the writer. 3 points will come from suggestions on how to improve the writing. An additional 3 points will come from helpful suggestions on understanding the particular site under discussion.

V. Faculty Conference (optional):

Written feedback from the instructor will be provided during the peer review process. Following completion of the writing group discussion, the writer should consider the feedback provided. In the following week (Oct. 8-12), the writer may meet with the instructor to discuss the feedback provided. Please bring all copies of the feedback provided by your writing group members and any other notes relating to the writing group discussion. This conference will be a one-on-one meeting in the instructor's office (SC435) lasting for no more than 20 minutes at a pre-scheduled time. A sign-up sheet will be provided. While not required, the purpose of this exercise is to give the writer an additional opportunity to discuss both his or her writing and growing understanding of the site.

VI. Response to Feedback: (3 pts)

Once the peer review process and optional faculty conference have been completed, you are in a position to revise your Initial Essay. As part of this process, I ask that you write a response (½ - 1 page) on the quality of the feedback you received. Questions to be answered in paragraph form include:

- What was helpful to your writing?
- What was not helpful?
- Which insights into understanding your site did your reviewers provide?
 - Did you agree with the reviewers? Why or why not?
- What did you think of this process as a means for improving your writing and project?

This response will be awarded 3 points based on the degree to which you are able to incorporate the feedback given in a responsible way. This does not necessarily mean agreeing with your reviewers, but addressing the concerns they raise in a way that improves your project. This response should be turned in **on Nov. 1** with your revised Initial Essay.

VII. Revised Initial Essay:

This segment allows you the chance to incorporate the suggestions and input of your writing group and instructor in improving your initial essay. Please feel free to incorporate or, perhaps, exclude any of the suggestions given (Reasons for both should be given in your "Response to Feedback"). Remember that your goal is to improve the quality of the writing and description, NOT to change the content of the initial essay. For example, if you initially believed that a certain feature of your site was formed by regeneration after harvest, but now know that it was formed by changing climate, that's great, but DO NOT change your initial impression in the Initial Essay. Save that insight for the Site Revisited Essay at the end of the semester. You should turn in your revised essay for grading by your instructor, along with the peer-reviewed copies of your paper and your responses to the feedback by **Nov. 1**. The points listed for those segments will be awarded at this time.

VIII. Site Revisited Essay: (55 pts)

This is your opportunity to tie things together. Over the semester you have learned, hopefully, a great deal about some fundamental processes that help shape the vegetation of any given place. You have also learned a little about the role that humans and their activities may play in this process. Now is your chance to re-evaluate your Initial Essay, in light of what you now know. Having revised your Initial Essay already, revisit the site by addressing the following topics:

- Identify and explain any significant features from your initial site description that you can now give a specific name or recognition that was lacking in the original essay. In other words, what have you learned in class that you would want to add to your initial essay if you could write it now? In particular, include information gleaned during the topical studies turned in via e-mail. (8)
- Describe the NATURAL forces that continue to shape your favorite place today. (6)
- What anthropogenic (human) forces are at work on your favorite place? (6)
- How might your favorite place change in the future, given the forces you have identified? (5)
- More specifically, how might your favorite place change if a temperature change of 3°C were to occur in the next 50 years? (6)
- What role does precipitation play with regards to this temperature change? (6)
- What old or new questions do you still have about your special place? (3)
- Who is responsible for determining the future of your special place? (3)
- What role can/will you play in the future of your special place? (3)
- Bibliography of resources used in completing this assignment. (3)
 - *At the very least*, your bibliography should contain a reference to the map that you obtained.
- Spelling & Grammar in this segment (4)
- With your new-found knowledge, identify which lectures actually helped you to learn about your special place by completing the check-list for this essay distributed in class. (2)

You should be able to achieve your objective in 4-5 pages typed (double spaced, font size = 11-12, **not** including the course topics page, pictures, or diagrams), but feel free to write more if you feel so inspired. Do not feel that you should have answered every nuance of every question about your special place at this point. Gaining knowledge is a lifelong endeavor and the activities that you have engaged in during this semester are just a stage in, what I hope, will be a long and inspiring relationship between you and your special place.

Special Place Project Assessment:

A project as complex as this with topics as diverse as the people in this class is inherently difficult to assess. The 130 points for the entire project are identified under the 8 segments above. In some cases, a point is awarded based on whether or not a piece of information is included or not. In cases where multiple points are available, one of the rubrics below will be used. The first is for items, which the writer really should be able to answer in full with the knowledge available to them; for example: Description of the special place or the climate of the location. The second rubric is reserved for items where the writer is speculating about a question based upon incomplete information; Example: What did my special place look like before 1800 or what will climate change bring in the future?

Rubric 1: Used for Descriptive Items

Maximum Points	Median Points	Minimum Points	No Points
Point or question is addressed in a way that is CONSISTENT with the course content AND shows insight AND accuracy.	Point or question is addressed in a way that is CONSISTENT with the course content AND shows insight OR accuracy.	Point or question is addressed but is INCONSISTENT with the course content BUT shows insight AND/OR accuracy.	Fails to address the question or item.

Examples: On the question of climate for Central Mississippi:

The subtropical climate of Central Mississippi is hot and humid in summer and warm and humid in winter, which makes it relatively easy for vegetation to thrive. Average temperature in the summer is 32.8°C while the winter has a mean maximum daily temperature daily of 14.4°C and lows down to 3.9°C. Precipitation comes year-round, totaling 158 cm, very rarely in the form of snow in winter.

MAXIMUM POINTS because of accuracy and the insight on seasonality.

The mild climate of Central Mississippi has summer time highs of 32.8°C with winter lows down to 14.4°C. Precipitation is fairly constant all year long with about 158 cm falling.

MEDIAN POINTS because of accuracy. No particular insight shown.

Central Mississippi is warm because it is near the Gulf of Mexico. This is why it gets a lot of rain in the summer. The mild climate is conducive to vegetation growth.

MINIMUM POINTS because the content given is inconsistent with the expectation of the course and the cause of warm/cold climates. It does not give sufficient information, but does show insight regarding vegetation growth.

Central Mississippi is a hot, humid place with lots of rain.

NO POINTS because it doesn't address the question of climate adequately.

Rubric 2: Used for Speculative Items

Maximum Points	Median Points	Minimum Points	No Points
Point or question is addressed in a way that is CONSISTENT with the course content AND evidence is presented to support the argument AND shows insight.	Point or question is addressed in a way that is CONSISTENT with the course content AND evidence is presented to support the argument OR shows insight.	Point or question is addressed BUT is INCONSISTENT with the course content AND evidence is presented to support the argument OR shows insight.	FAILS to address the question or item.

Examples: On the question of what Central Mississippi looked like before 1800:

Central Mississippi was heavily forested before 1800 because there were few people in the area except in relatively isolated settlements. However, people began moving into the area in the 1800s, building large plantations and harvesting large tracts of forest. Many swamps shrank in size as people began to fill them in to increase the potential for agricultural land. Many swamps were too difficult to reclaim and were, for the most part, ignored, except during hunting season.

MAXIMUM POINTS because the question is fully addressed in a form that is consistent with the course content on vegetation, evidence to support the points is used **CORRECTLY** and the possibility of early conditions being continued in the swamp area is insightful (also happens to be correct).

The swamps of Central Mississippi, although smaller, are most likely similar to the way they would have looked in 1800. Periodic disturbances, such as hurricanes and fires, likely developed the swamps that we see today.

MEDIAN POINTS because the question is fully addressed in a form that is consistent with the course content and shows insight, but does not provide evidence to support its contentions.

Central Mississippi was probably not heavily forested because of agriculture. Swamps exist where agriculture couldn't be employed. The climate hasn't changed much, and there has been little change in the swamps.

MINIMUM POINTS because the question is addressed and shows some insight but is inconsistent with the course content by misapplying evidence.

The swamps of Central Mississippi are in a warm subtropical area that hasn't changed since 1800.

NO POINTS because the question is not addressed thoroughly, the statements are inconsistent with the content of the course and neither evidence nor insight is presented.

To Turn In on Nov. 29:

You should turn this essay in combined in a 3-ring style folder or notebook with all your original materials *and* revisions. While these projects are due on November 29, you are welcome to turn them in early to spare your poor instructor's sanity! They will be available for you to pick up during the Final Exam at the latest. Good luck and enjoy your journey of discovery!

You should organize the materials in the following order:

- Cover Page
- Site Revisited Essay
- Bibliography
- Revised Initial Essay, including map and picture(s)
- 3 Drafts of Initial Essay (with comments from 2 peer reviewers and instructor)
- Response to Feedback
- 5 Topic Knowledge Sheets (compiled from e-mails)
- Initial Course Topic Relevance Sheet
- Final Course Topic Relevance Sheet

Special Place Project Assessment Sheet 1

Name: _____

Final Score: _____

Special Place Name/Location: _____

Revised Initial Essay (35 Points)

Site Description & Importance

Name, location, and map of your site (5) _____

Description of topography, soil, etc. (2) _____

Description of the plant and animal life on the site. (3) _____

Description of the climate (3) _____

Diagram or pictures (2) _____

Why is this site important to you? (2) _____

Site Evolution *

Your special place in 1800 and how it has changed. (4) _____

How is the site used today? (4) _____

Site Investigation *

Questions you have about your site? (2) _____

Course Topic Relevance Sheet (2) _____

Writing Mechanics

Spelling and Grammar (3) _____

Flow of the Writing (3) _____

Special Place Project Assessment Sheet 2

Name: _____

Final Score: _____

Special Place Name/Location: _____

Peer Review (15 Points)

Date of Faculty Conference (opt.): _____

Conference Attended: Yes No

Review of Writing of: _____ (6) _____

Review of Writing of: _____ (6) _____

Response to Writing Feedback (3) _____

Developing Content Knowledge (25 Points)

Topic 1: _____ (5) _____

Topic 2: _____ (5) _____

Topic 3: _____ (5) _____

Topic 4: _____ (5) _____

Topic 5: _____ (5) _____

Special Place Project Assessment Sheet 3 (55 Points)

Name: _____

Final Score: _____

Special Place Name/Location: _____

Site Revisited

What would you add to your initial essay if you were to rewrite it today? (8) _____

NATURAL forces that continue to shape your special place today (6) _____

Anthropogenic forces at work on your special place (6) _____

How your special place will change in the future? (5) _____

How special place may change given a global warming of 3°C in 50 years? (6) _____

What role does precipitation play with regards to this temperature change? (6) _____

What old or new questions do you still have about your special place? (3) _____

Who is responsible for determining the future of your special place? (3) _____

What role can/will you play in the future of your special place? (3) _____

Bibliography of resources used in completing this assignment (3) _____

Spelling & Grammar (4) _____

Course Topic Relevance Sheet (2) _____