A noted historian and anthropologist, Joseph Tainter comes to the College from Arizona State University’s Global Institute of Sustainability where he served as a professor and researcher. He previously served as project leader of Albuquerque’s Cultural Heritage Research Project, Rocky Mountain Research Station, and taught at the University of New Mexico.

Tainter’s professional experience includes 28 years with the USDA Forest Service, where he learned firsthand about conflict between human needs and environmental values.

“Fundamental questions about resource management revolve around people’s needs, perceptions and values,” he says.

“If we can’t address human issues, we can’t address natural resources issues. These are right at the heart of society and environment.”

Among Tainter’s best known works is The Collapse of Complex Societies. In the book, first published in 1988, he examines the demise of several ancient civilizations and applies lessons from history to modern-day societies. Such collapse occurs, he contends, when a society’s investments in social complexity reach a point of diminishing returns. “A unifying theme of the book and my research is sustainability,” Tainter says. “What do members of a society value enough to work to sustain?”

A San Francisco native, Tainter studied anthropology at the University of California and Northwestern University, where he earned a doctorate in 1975.

Joe is among the sustainability experts featured in Leonardo DiCaprio’s new eco-documentary, “The 11th Hour.” The film is currently showing in theaters nationwide and will be shown at the Logan Art Cinema Oct. 5-11.

He succeeds Professor Terry Sharik, who served as department head for five years. Sharik departed August 1 for a sabbatical year at the University of Michigan.

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(UT State Today, July 2008)
Kaisi Baron, a USU 2007 graduate in watershed sciences, served as coordinator of a six-year-old volunteer monitoring program, known as Utah Lake Watch. “We’ve had a great response from the public,” says Baron. In 2005 20 lakes and reservoirs were successfully monitored, and in 2006 30 sites were completed.

“Data collected by volunteers is used in mandatory assessment reports that we submit to the Environmental Protection Agency,” says Theron Miller, environmental scientist with the Utah Department of Water Quality. “The more data we receive, the more accurate our reports can be.”

The monitoring procedure involves lowering a device called a Secchi disk, invented in the 1860s by Italian astrophysicist Pietro Angelo Secchi, into the water and recording the depth of its vanishing point. Readings provide a standardized measurement of water clarity.

“It’s a simple procedure – it takes just a few minutes to perform,” says Baron. “It’s an easy, fun volunteer activity and a good excuse to do something good for the environment.”

Secchi measurements enable water scientists to monitor the water’s turbidity or cloudiness caused by suspended or dissolved material, says Baron. The amount of turbidity, usually caused by sediment, phytoplankton, decaying leaves or plants or a combination of these, is a key indicator of the water’s ability to sustain aquatic plant and animal life.

Volunteer Konnor Andersen says he’s learned “lots” from taking readings in Bear Lake, which straddles the border of Utah and Idaho.

As the cadre of Utah Lake Watch volunteers grows and data is banked, so too, will the state of Utah have increasingly accurate information from which to observe trends. For information on participating in Utah Lake Watch, contact Su Anderson, (susana@ext.usu.edu), the 2007 USU coordinator.

(Mary-Ann Muffoletto, Utah State Today)
Brent Bibles received a B.S. in fisheries and wildlife from Utah State University, and an M.S. and Ph.D. in wildlife and fisheries science from the University of Arizona.

Brent is joining the Department of Wildland Resources, working in the Uintah Basin. In the past 20 years he has worked with a variety of raptor species, and has been heavily involved in prairie dog and black-footed ferret work in northeastern Utah and northwestern Colorado. Most recently, he worked as an avian researcher for the Colorado Division of Wildlife evaluating the effectiveness of occupancy modeling for monitoring burrowing owl populations occupying white-tailed prairie dog colonies, and examining the influence of black-tailed prairie dog colony attributes on burrowing owl reproductive success. His research interests involve the influence of habitat selection and habitat quality on population dynamics, and the conservation of sensitive, threatened, and endangered species.

Welcome Brent!

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The Department of Wildland Resources welcomes Dave Koons, a population ecologist. Dave earned a masters degree from Montana State University, Bozeman, studying breeding ecology, population dynamics, and potential reasons for the decline of lesser scaup, a species he had been captivated with since the age of 10. Expanding his interest in population biology, Dave studied transient dynamics and population moment of arctic waterbirds and various other vertebrates for his Ph.D., which he earned in 2005 from Auburn University. He recently completed a two-year post-doctoral study at the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research in Germany.

Dave’s research interests include animal population ecology, avian ecology, anthropogenic impacts on natural resources and populations, estimation of demographic parameters, the influence of unobservable individual heterogeneity on estimates of demographic parameters, dynamics of structured populations, population dynamics and evolution in variable environments, life history evolution, and most recently, quantitative genetics.

Welcome Dave! david.koons@usu.edu

Mike Dietz joins the faculty of Environment and Society as an assistant professor and Extension specialist in sustainable living. He comes to USU from the University of Connecticut, where he earned a B.A. in psychology in 1994, a M.S. in natural resources management and engineering in 2001, and a Ph.D. in 2005, also in natural resources management and engineering. His research focuses on alternative stormwater treatment practices and low impact development techniques, and on the human dimension of natural resources conservation. His current position in sustainable living will be focused on energy issues, such as alternative sources of energy and personal choices in energy use. Mike will also be directing the Utah House, which is a demonstration of more sustainable construction techniques, sustainable landscaping, and healthy living (http://extension.usu.edu/cooperative/utahouse/).

Mike will be teaching a course in sustainable living in the spring (ENVS 5570).

Welcome Mike!

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Chris Monz is an assistant professor in the Department of Environment and Society. Chris joined the USU faculty this year, having previously been in the Environmental Studies Department at St. Lawrence University, Canton, New York. He has also served as the academic dean of Sterling College in Vermont and as research scientist for the National Outdoor Leadership School in Wyoming. He holds a Ph.D. in recreation resource management from Colorado State University and an M.S. in ecology and B.A. in biology. His current research interests include the assessment and management of human impacts to parks with a particular focus on arctic and alpine environments. Chris is an active mountaineer, runner and skier and has worked as a naturalist, ranger, and rock climbing instructor. At every available opportunity he can be found in the outdoors with his wife, Wyatt, and three-year-old son, Jackson.

Welcome Chris!

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Alumni Update

Harv Forsgren, ’76, has been selected to be the new regional forester for the Intermountain Region (Region 4). “Harv has demonstrated outstanding leadership managing the many complex issues in the Southwest and is superbly qualified to take on their new challenges in the Intermountain Region,” said U.S. Forest Service Chief Abigail Kimbell. The Intermountain Region consists of 13 national forests and one national grassland located in Utah, Nevada, southern Idaho and western Wyoming. Harv graduated with a degree in fisheries management, and was awarded the CNR Professional Achievement Award in 2000.

Upcoming Events

NR Week, USU Campus. Week of October 8, 2007
Old Main Weekend, USU Campus, October 19 and 20, 2007
SAF National Meeting, Alumni Social. Oregon Convention Center, Portland Oregon. Wednesday, October 24, 2007, 6:00 p.m.
SRM National Meeting, Alumni Social. The Galt House Hotel, Louisville, Kentucky. January 19, 2008, 6:00 p.m.
Paul W. Nichols was enrolled at the University of Florida in 1972 when he stopped in Utah to visit relatives on the way home from a surfing trip to Mexico. Fortuitously, he ended up talking with Professor Richard Hawkins in Watershed Sciences who convinced him that Utah State would be the best place for him to finish his degree. In the winter of 1973 Paul transferred to the College of Natural Resources at USU where he completed his degree in 1975. Paul took a job working for Dames & Moore in Washington, D.C. working as a hydrologist. He quickly learned that desk work did not suit him and he made plans in the fall of 1976 to return to USU to get a master’s degree. That summer, while working a job at Weyerhaeuser in the Northwest, (also arranged by Professor Hawkins!) Paul decided to take an old friend up on an offer to go to work to make a “real living”. He decided to stay in the Northwest and learn the carpentry trade. His wife was finishing law school in Eugene, Oregon, and needed to return to Florida to take the bar exam. They moved to Florida, and long story-short, Paul is still there today. In Florida Paul went into contracting, moving on to home building and residential development. Today he owns the very successful firm BESTCON Homes and BESTCON of Jacksonville, which is the development arm of the company. The companies have been rated in the top 25 developers and home builders in northeast Florida by the Jacksonville Business Journal. Paul credits his training in Watershed Sciences at the College of Natural Resources for his success in building his low-impact development company.

Interestingly, Paul has put the word “paradise” into all of his development projects because while at USU, he lived in the small Cache Valley town of Paradise, Utah and has incredibly fond memories of the place. The skill and care in preserving environmental values was evident in the design of Paradise Key. Paul took a blighted, mosquito control canal and brought it back to the surface and now it runs as a pristine stream corridor through the development. It has walking paths and serves as wildlife habitat for birds and other animals. Paul’s commitment to improving the environment in his developments for the benefit of its residents and wildlife is impressive.

In addition to his work, Paul is an avid surfer and routinely travels to exotic locations to catch the best waves. The rack of surfboards in his offices at BESTCON attests to his love of the water and its impact on his corporate philosophy.

In Memory

1937  Max Bridge, Fisheries & Wildlife
1937  Doyle Lund, Forest/Range Management
1938  Sherman Hansen, Forestry
1942  Rex Hampton, Forestry
1942  Burt F. Rouse, Fisheries & Wildlife
1947  Merrill Roberts, Forest Management
1952  Eugene Wunderlich, Range Management
1959  Arthur Kinsky, Fisheries & Wildlife
1961  Melvin Anhold, Forest Recreation
1978  Richard Paul, Fisheries & Wildlife
1999  Brett W. Thompson, Fisheries & Wildlife

Dr. John Kadlec, former professor and dean of the College of Natural Resources. July 2007.