

Sasha Chavkin
Ted Scripps Fellow in Environmental Journalism, 2021-2022
University of Colorado, Boulder

Crime, Corruption & Climate Change

The global community's efforts to confront the climate crisis are facing a major obstacle: growing rates of environmental crime and corruption. Serious climate threats such as the decimation of tropical rainforests and massive methane discharges by the oil and gas industries are largely driven by unlawful activity. Government support for fossil fuels often stems from undue influence and graft. From the world's top carbon-emitting nations to developing countries where many vital ecological resources are found, leaders' promises to curb emissions are on a collision course with widespread impunity for environmental crime.

This independent study will examine the scope and consequences of environmental crime and corruption, with a focus on illegal deforestation. It will assess tools and techniques for measuring the climate impact of environmental crime, laws and policies created to combat these abuses, and the international community's efforts to address the problem. Finally, it will consider how investigative journalism can better uncover environmental corruption and crime and convey to audiences the global significance of these threats. The study will provide the knowledge and expertise to identify the most promising paths forward in exposing and countering environmental crime and corruption and their role in the climate crisis.

Objectives:

- Gain a broad understanding of the nature and scope of environmental crime and corruption
- Learn the ways in which environmental crime and corruption contribute to climate change, and how if at all these contributions are measured
- Examine the primary responses to date by national and international authorities to climate-related crime and corruption, and assess these policies' effectiveness
- Review how investigative journalism has addressed environmental crime and corruption, and identify the most promising paths forward

Environmental Crime and Corruption: Defining the Problem

What is the scope and impact of environmental crime? How do environmental crime and corruption schemes work? Who are the victims of environmental crime?

Week 1: Overview: environmental crime and its victims

The Rise of Environmental Crime: A Growing Threat to Natural Resources, Peace, Development and Security.

INTERPOL and United Nations Environment Program, 2016. Pages 1-57, 93

Last Line of Defense: The industries causing the climate crisis and attacks against land and environmental defenders

Global Witness, September 2021

Week 2: Illegal deforestation: case studies and analysis

The Amazon Is Fast Approaching a Point of No Return

Jessica Brice, Bloomberg Businessweek/Pulitzer Center, July 29, 2021.

The Consultant: Why did a palm oil conglomerate pay \$22m to an unnamed 'expert' in Papua?

The Gecko Project, June 25, 2020

Uncovering the Risks of Corruption in the Forestry Sector

INTERPOL, December 9, 2016.

Week 3: The Fossil Fuel Industry

Flaring in Texas: A Comprehensive Government Failure

Jack McDonald and Sharon Wilson, EarthWorks, August 2021

Exxon's Own Research Confirmed Fossil Fuels' Role in Global Warming Decades Ago

Neela Banerjee, Lisa Song and David Hasemyer, Inside Climate News, September 16, 2015

Coalruption: Shedding Light on Political Corruption in Indonesia's Coal Mining Sector

Bersihkan Indonesia, December 2018

Environmental Crime and Climate Change: Measuring the Impact

What methods are used to measure environmental crime? How much do crime and corruption contribute to global carbon emissions? Who are the most significant perpetrators of crimes that contribute to climate change?

Week 4: Statistical overview: environmental crime and climate impacts

Quantifying the Impacts of Environmental Crime

European Union Action to Fight Environmental Crime (EFFACE), December 2015

By the Numbers: The Value of Tropical Forests in the Climate Change Equation

David Gibbs, Nancy Harris and Francis Seymour, World Resources Institute, October 4, 2018

Primary Rainforest Destruction Increased 12% from 2019 to 2020

Mikaela Weisse and Liz Goldman, Global Forest Watch, March 31, 2021

Week 5: Agribusiness and environmental crime

ILLICIT HARVEST, COMPLICIT GOODS: THE STATE OF ILLEGAL DEFORESTATION FOR AGRICULTURE

Cassie Dummett and Arthur Blundell, Forest Trends, May 2021. Pages 1-47.

The rotten apples of Brazil's agribusiness

Raoni Rajao, Holly Gibbs, et al, Science, July 2020. Read article, skip supplementary materials.

Global food system emissions could preclude achieving the 1.5° and 2°C climate change targets

Michael A. Clark et al, Science, November 2020

Week 6: Land-use change laboratories

Understanding the role of illicit transactions in land-change dynamics

Beth Tellman, Nicholas R. Magliocca et al, Nature Sustainability, March 2020

Illicit Drivers of Land Use Change: Narcotrafficking and Forest Loss in Central America

Beth Tellman, Steven Sesnie, Global Environmental Change, July 2020

Protecting irrecoverable carbon in Earth's ecosystems
Allie Goldstein, Holly Gibbs, et al, Nature Climate Change, April 2020

Environmental Crime and Impunity: Assessing the Response

What laws are used to prosecute environmental crimes? How has the international community attempted to address environmental crime? What are the most effective policy and law enforcement solutions?

Week 7: International Environmental Law

International Environmental Law and Environmental Crime: An Introduction

Teresa Fajardo, European Union Action to Fight Environmental Crime (EFFACE), January 2015
GLOBAL FORESTRY ENFORCEMENT: Strengthening Law Enforcement Cooperation Against Forestry Crime

INTERPOL, April 2019

ENVIRONMENTAL RULE OF LAW: First Global Report (Executive Summary, Introduction and Future Directions)

United Nations Environment Program, January 2019. Executive Summary, pages 1-35, 225-243.

Week 8: International Criminal Law and 'Ecocide'

Policy paper on case selection and prioritization

Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, September 15, 2016

The Campaign to Make Ecocide an International Crime: Quixotic Quest or Moral Imperative?

Anastacia Greene, Fordham Environmental Law Review, Spring 2019

How 165 Words Could Make Mass Environmental Destruction An International Crime

Josie Fischels, NPR, June 27, 2021.

Week 9: Corporate commitments and compliance

Disrupting the Global Commodity Business: How Strange Bedfellows Are Transforming a Trillion-Dollar Industry to Protect Forests, Benefit Local Communities, and Slow Global Warming

Climate and Land Use Alliance, September 2014

Forest conservation effects of Brazil's zero deforestation cattle agreements undermined by leakage

Jennifer Alix Garcia and Holly Gibbs, Global Environmental Change, November 2017

Getting the "Bads" Out of Goods: Evolution from voluntary to regulated approaches in reducing the undesirable impacts of global trade

Forest Trends, June 2018

Journalism on Environmental Crime: Efforts at Accountability

How does media coverage affect accountability for environmental crime? What journalistic investigations of environmental crime have had the greatest impact? What are the most promising new directions for investigating environmental crime and corruption?

Week 10: The media and climate accountability

The media are complacent while the world burns

Mark Hertsgaard and Kyle Pope, Columbia Journalism Review/The Nation, April 22, 2019

Balance as bias, resolute on the retreat? Updates & analyses of newspaper coverage in the United States, United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia and Canada over the past 15 years

Lucy McAllister, Maxwell Boykoff et al, Environmental Research Letter, August 2021.

Uncovering corruption: The role of investigative journalism in combatting environmental crime and prompting accountability

Targeting Natural Resource Corruption blog, World Wildlife Fund, March 2021

Week 11: Case study: 'Exxon Knew' and its fallout

Big oil and gas kept a dirty secret for decades. Now they may pay the price

Chris McGreal, The Guardian, June 24, 2021

Rhetoric and frame analysis of ExxonMobil's climate change communications

Geoffrey Supran and Naomi Oreskes, One Earth, May 21, 2021.

State of Minnesota, Plaintiff, vs. American Petroleum Institute, Exxon Mobil Corporation, et al. Attorney General Keith Ellison, June 24, 2020