

For immediate release

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Prehistoric Sustainability Talk Launches The Utah Museum of Natural History's The Nature of Things Lecture Series on Feb. 19

SALT LAKE CITY – How sustainable were the practices of the prehistoric peoples of America prior to the arrival of the Europeans?

That question will be investigated when the Utah Museum of Natural History's Dr. Mitchell Power launches The Nature of Things Lecture series on Thursday, Feb. 19, at the City Library in downtown Salt Lake City. It starts at 7 p.m. Power's lecture is open and free to the public, and it can also be heard live on KCPW at 88.3 or 105.3 on the FM dial.

The 2009 series will examine "Our Changing Relationship with the Natural World," and it features four speakers. Power's talk leads into the keynote speaker, the best-selling author and authority on sustainability, Thomas Friedman on March 10.

Power's lecture, titled "Challenges to living in Prehistoric Americas: Climate change, fires and the arrival of Europeans," takes the modern definition of sustainability and applies it to the prehistoric time in America. The goal is to see if the prehistoric Native Americans subscribed to sustainable practices.

"I want to look at the level of impact that the prehistoric people of America had on their natural environment," said Power. "I've set up a hypothesis that revolves around the arrival of Europeans to the Americas. I call it, 'The 1492 Hypothesis.'

"It's known that the arrival of the Europeans brought new diseases to the Americas, and that it resulted in high mortality rates among the native people. If indeed the mortality rate was as far-reaching as theorized, then the demographic collapse would, in turn, result in a resurgence of the landscape."

Last fall, Power published research that constructed the first-ever global database of charcoal, effectively charting the relationship between landscape change and fire history over the last two millennia.

"We're exploring regions where populations were high and where we also have records of fire activity," said Power. "We'll look at both unpopulated regions like the Boreal Forest and more densely populated areas like Central and Tropical America. By comparing those two regions before and after the arrival of Europeans, I think it'll paint a telling picture of the impact that prehistoric people in America had on their surroundings.

"I think we'll see that the Native Americans were a resourceful people, and that the Americas weren't this 'raw and untouched' land like Europeans and many 20th-century scholars have thought."

The series continues after Power's lecture on March 10 at 7 p.m., when Thomas Friedman talks about "Why we need a green revolution and how it can renew America" at Abravanel Hall. Tickets for the Friedman lecture are on sale through The Museum's Web site, www.umnh.utah.edu, or through artTix. Prices for the tickets are \$10, \$18 or \$35.

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The Nature of Things lecture series, in partnership with the Hinckley Institute at the University of Utah, and underwritten by the R. Harold Burton Foundation, is in its third year.

2009 The Nature of Things: Our Changing Relationship with the Natural World

Feb. 19 at 7 p.m. at the City Library

Dr. Mitchell Power - Challenges to living in Prehistoric Americas: Climate change, fires, and the arrival of the Europeans

March 10 at 7 p.m. at Abravanel Hall

Thomas Friedman - Hot Flat and Crowded: Why we need a green revolution and how it can renew America

April 2 at 7 p.m. at the City Library

Dr. Fred Wagner - Global Warming, New Ecosystems, and a "No Analog Future"

April 23 at 7 p.m. at the City Library

Dr. Tyrone Hayes - From Silent Spring to Silent Night: Frogs as Canaries