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## BROWN-BAG PRESENTATION

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# Institutional aspects of carbon lock-in: obstacles and opportunities for transitioning to a low-carbon world

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12:00pm – 1:00 pm  
John A. Burns Hall, Room 3012 (3rd floor)

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Many of today's decisions and actions will determine our greenhouse gas emissions for decades to come, severely limiting opportunities to change course, especially towards transformative change. The entrapment of a system into a state of constrained physical, economic and social opportunities for change – for instance to adapt to and solve, among other things, climate change-related challenges – is referred to as carbon lock-in. Path dependency occurs in the evolution of complex systems where there are increasing returns to scale, most notably in connection with socio-economic and technical systems with large inertia in social and institutional structures. With respect to climate change, the urgency of action exacerbates the liability of even small lock-in risks. This talk focuses, in particular, on why and how political processes and institutions have placed the US and the world on a high-carbon trajectory and where the opportunities exist, within existing processes and institutions, to transition to a low-carbon trajectory.

*Ronald Mitchell* is a Professor of Political Science and Environmental Studies at the University of Oregon and an expert on international environmental politics and law. He has published *International Politics and the Environment* (Sage, 2010), *International Environmental Politics* (Sage, 2008), *Global Environmental Assessments: Information and Influence* (with William Clark, David Cash, and Nancy Dickson, MIT Press, 2006), and *Intentional Oil Pollution at Sea: Environmental Policy and Treaty Compliance* (MIT Press, 1994). He has published over 40 articles and chapters in edited volumes. His current research focuses on the effectiveness of international environmental agreements (focusing on climate change, fisheries, and transboundary air pollution) and he has developed a database of all multilateral environmental treaties and corresponding performance indicators. From 2003-2014, he was co-director (with C. Susan Weiler of Whitman College) of the Dissertation Initiative for the Advancement of Climate Change Research (DISCCRS) program which helps new scientists working on climate change develop interdisciplinary skills to improve their understanding of, and ability to help solve, the problem of climate change. He teaches courses on international relations, international environmental politics, and international organization.