



Aldo Leopold

1886–1948

**Father of Wildlife Management and Conservation
Conservationist, naturalist, forester, philosopher, educator,
writer, and outdoor enthusiast**

Aldo Leopold is considered the father of wildlife ecology and one of the earliest professionals to promote conservation of the natural world. He was a renowned scientist and scholar, an exceptional teacher and philosopher, and a gifted writer. He is best known by millions around the world for his book, *A Sand County Almanac*, published a little over a year after his death.

A Sand County Almanac, often acclaimed as the century's literary landmark in conservation, reflects an evolution of a lifetime of love, observation, and thought. In it, Leopold describes the development of his own ecological conscience and outlines his famous "land ethic." He believed that each person needed to become a custodian of the landscape, a belief that led to a philosophy that has guided many to discovering what it means to live in harmony with the land and with one another. With over two million copies sold, *A Sand County Almanac* is one of the most respected books on the natural world ever published. Leopold has come to be regarded by many an influential conservationist.

Leopold believed that the future of American wildlife lay largely on private land: in the attitudes and decisions, wise or otherwise, of American farmers and landowners. In "The Land Ethic," the final essay of his book, Leopold defines a new relationship between people and nature, setting the stage for modern conservation and ecological movements. Leopold understood that it is a sense of ethics that direct individuals to cooperate with each other for the mutual benefit of a greater community. One of his philosophical suggestions was the expansion of this 'community' to include non-human elements such as soil, water, plants, and animals, **"or collectively: the land."** **"That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology,"** he writes, **"but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics."** This recognition, according to Leopold, implies that individuals play an important role in protecting and preserving the health of this enlarged, encompassing community. Leopold's suggested 'land ethic' **"reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for the health of land."**

Central to Leopold's philosophy is the assertion to **"quit thinking about decent land use as solely an economic problem."** While recognizing the influence that economics have on decisions, Leopold understood that, ultimately, our economic well being could not be separated from the well being of our environment. Therefore, he believed it was critical that people have a close, personal connection to the land, since **"we can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in."**

Biography

Born January 11, 1887 near Burlington, Iowa, Leopold developed an interest in the natural world at an early age. He spent hours observing, journaling, and sketching his surroundings while exploring the Mississippi River bluffs and backwaters near his home. Nicknamed "the Naturalist" by his schoolmates, Leopold tramped through woodlands whenever he could, generally studied hard, and graduated from the newly formed School of Forestry at Yale in 1909. With his Master's of Forestry degree in hand, Leopold joined the newly established U.S. Forest Service in Arizona and New

Mexico. By the age of 24, he had been promoted to the post of Supervisor for the Carson National Forest in New Mexico.

Before leaving the Southwest for a job with the U.S. Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin, Leopold recommended that the Gila region in New Mexico be designated as a roadless area of wilderness. He didn't want to see that area subdivided for recreational "improvements" (home sites, public campgrounds, private and commercial leasing). In 1924, the Forest Service accepted his recommendation and designated the Gila region as a wilderness area, 40 years before the passing of the Wilderness Act. Later, Leopold also helped to create the Wilderness Society and the Wildlife Society.

In time, Leopold came to be known as the father of wildlife management in America. In 1933 he was appointed chair of a new Game Management Department at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. His book, *Game Management*, was to become a 'bible' of the new profession. The objective of the theory of game management was to preserve healthy, functioning ecological systems rather than protect individual animal. In "The Land Ethic," he writes that **"a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community."** He was keenly interested in people's relationship with the land.

For years Aldo had been looking for land near Madison to use as a weekend retreat. In 1935, on a bend of the Wisconsin River, he found an abandoned farm with a marsh, an overused corn field, and a dry hill of drifting sand. The only standing structure was a chicken shed, its floor deep in manure. Leopold bought it and slowly began restoring the land. His observations and insights from restoring this land formed the basis for *A Sand County Almanac*. In 1948, Leopold died at the age of 61 while aiding a neighbor in fighting a fire on an adjacent farmstead.

Leopold's converted chicken shed, the "shack," still stands in the sandy country along the Wisconsin River. It serves as a source of inspiration, a symbol of simple living and of the importance of working to understand the land. In his own words, Aldo Leopold championed **"things natural, wild, and free."** Leopold's legacy continues to inform and inspire us to see the natural world **"as a community to which we belong."**

Additional Quotations

"Like winds and sunsets, wild things were taken for granted until progress began to do away with them. Now we face the question whether a still higher 'standard of living' is worth its cost in things natural, wild, and free."

"For us in the minority, the opportunity to see geese is more important than television, and the chance to find a pasque flower is a right as inalienable as free speech."

"A land ethic changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members and also respect for the community as such."

Resources

The Aldo Leopold Foundation. <http://www.aldoleopold.org>

Wisconsin DNR, EE News 3.3. <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/caer/ce/ee/nature/aldo.htm>

Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/about/aldo.htm>