



BOOKS, ETC.

The River of the Mother of God and Other Essays by Aldo Leopold.

Edited by Susan L. Flader and J. Baird Callicott. 384 pp., illus., bibliog., index, 1991. University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 53715. \$24.95.

A generation has passed since the initial publication of Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* in 1948. It is sometimes difficult, in these days of heightened attention to fundamental issues of conservation, to appreciate the might of the cultural tide against which Leopold launched his modest but buoyant book. And it is sometimes hard, as we as individuals have become more attuned to the "delights and dilemmas" of conservation, to remember how our personal vistas opened when we first shared Leopold's insights: "We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." *A Sand County Almanac* has proven a durable vessel. It has influenced in incalculable ways the environmental attitudes of its generation, and its many readers now grapple, as did Leopold, with the challenge of defining our privileges and obligations within the land community.

Most of the essays that appear in *Sand County* were written only in the last eight years of Leopold's life, when Leopold had reached the height of his understanding of ecological processes, landscape change, and the historical significance of conservation. This is the only Leopold that most of his readers have been able to know—a wise, elder statesman of conservation, his penetrating senses, scientific attitude, wry wit, and patient integrity on full display. But these were qualities hard won in the day-to-day experiences of the working conservationist in the forest, field, tent, library, laboratory, office, classroom, and conference room. Invariably, Leopold translated his experiences into journal articles, essays, reports, and lectures—some 500 distinct publications by Susan Flader's count, as well as an additional multitude of unpublished documents—providing one of the most fascinating and important paper trails in twentieth century conservation. To read this new

collection of "the best and most representative" of Leopold's unpublished and hard-to-locate writings is to follow that trail as it led to *A Sand County Almanac*, to Leopold's valedictory land ethic, and, in many ways, to conservation's status quo.

Editors Flader and J. Baird Callicott faced a difficult but delightful challenge: how to compile a collection that would span Leopold's lifetime, encompass his varied interests, and illustrate his scientific, aesthetic, and ethical development. They have succeeded brilliantly. The first of the 59 items, written in 1904, is a classroom account of a hike in the New Jersey countryside where Leopold attended prep school ("Then he thought that this was surely the fairest country in all Jersey, and that after all it is a great thing to be alive.") The last is "The Ecological Science," the startling precursor to *Sand County's* "The Land Ethic" that Leopold delivered as an address in 1947 ("Everyone ought to be dissatisfied with the slow spread of conservation to the land. Our 'progress' still consists of letterhead pieties and convention oratory"). Inbetween, Leopold's full stylistic and thematic spectrum is on display, from the seminal examination of "The Wilderness and Its Place in Forest Recreational Policy" to the biting social commentary of "A Criticism of the Booster Spirit," from the brooding analysis of "Land Pathology" to the engaging description of "The Farmer as a Conservationist." The editors preface each item with brief contextual remarks and, in an excellent introduction, trace the conceptual lines that bind the collection and Leopold's thoughts and actions, together.

The Leopold that readers will find here is not different from that of *A Sand County Almanac*; the same keen mind, clean prose, balanced personality, and ready sense of humor are evident. These qualities, however, are embedded in a more tactile substrate of contemporary events, personalities, politics, and landscapes. As a result, the timeless quality of the *Almanac* is more muted, but the fresh thoughts often more resonant. From "Engineering and Conservation" (1938): "We end, I think, at what might be

called the standard paradox of the twentieth century: our tools are better than we are, and grow better faster than we do. They suffice to crack the atom and command the tides. But they do not suffice for the oldest task in human history: to live on a piece of land without spoiling it."

As a whole, this collection illustrates in the very best way possible—in Leopold's own words—the flowering of one of this century's unique intellects, in many of the diverse fields that still challenge us today: wilderness protection, environmental ethics and aesthetics, wildlife management and conservation biology, environmental history and economics. Moreover, it illustrates Leopold's unwillingness to concede that these are, or ever can be, separate fields.

Readers of the *JSWC* will be especially interested in having available, in several cases for the first time, a sample of Leopold's overlooked writings on soil erosion and conservation, agriculture, and the changing range and farm landscape of the 1920s and 1930s. The editors note that "Leopold's most significant early advances in ecological thinking came...in watershed management, a field quite removed from his previous training and experience" in forestry. That early concern with erosion processes in the Southwest would extend into Leopold's Wisconsin years and provide a solid base for his mature conservation philosophy. Those interested in the background of today's sustainable agricultural movement will find these essays particularly rewarding. The fact that these agricultural essays can now be read, for themselves and in the context of his other essays on wilderness, wildlife, policy, and philosophy, is one of this collection's most important contributions.

But, finally, for Leopold, the "delights" of being a conservationist always seemed to compensate for the "dilemmas." For all of the technical, political, and philosophical achievements that these essays record, it is the delight that Leopold took in his surroundings, and that his readers have for a generation taken in Leopold, that makes this collection most worthwhile. Conservationists, even in Leopold's day,

were liable to despair over the task before them; perhaps it will ever be thus. But listen to Leopold instructing his undergraduates in the lingering gloom of a post-World War II world: "I am trying to teach you that this alphabet of 'natural objects' (soils and rivers, birds and beasts) spells out a story, which he who runs may read—if he knows how. Once you learn to read the land, I have no fear of what you will do to it, or with it. And I know many pleasant things it will do for you." With these essays, "The Professor" provides further light and further joy, for a generation that will likely need them even more than the last.—**CURT MEINE**, *National Research Council, Washington, D.C.*

General

- Henry A. Wallace's Irrigation Frontier: On the Trail of the Corn Belt Farmer, 1909.* Edited by Richard Lowitt and Judith Fabry. 228 pp., illus., index, 1991. The University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Oklahoma 73019. \$24.95.
- Our Changing Continent.* 24 pp., illus., 1991. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20401. \$1.00.
- Geologic Time.* 20 pp., illus., 1991. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20401. \$1.25.
- Environmental Quality.* 408 pp., 1991. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20401. \$12.00.
- Land Stewardship in the Next Era of Conservation.* By V. Alaric Sample. 45 pp., illus., bibl., 1991. Grey Towers Press, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337.
- Global Patterns: Climate, Vegetation, and Soils.* By Wallace E. Akin. 380 pp., illus., bibl., index, 1991. The University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Oklahoma 73019. \$45.00.
- Ethics of Environment & Development: Global Challenge, International Response.* Edited by J. Ronald Engel and Joan Gibb Engel. 264 pp., illus., refs., index, 1990. \$29.95 clothbound, \$14.95 paperback.
- Soil and Water Conservation, Second Edition.* By Frederick R. Troeh, J. Arthur Hobbs, and Roy L. Donahue. 530 pp., illus., tpls., refs., apps., index, 1991. Prentice Hall, Inc.,

- Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 07632.
- Learning to Listen to the Land.* By Bill Willers. 1991. Island Press, Washington, D.C. 20009. \$24.95 cloth; \$14.95 paper.
- State of the World 1992.* By Lester R. Brown, et al. 250 pp., tpls., refs., index. Worldwatch Institute, Washington, D.C. 20036-1904. \$19.95 hardcover; \$10.95 paperback; \$7.95 for 2-4 copies; \$5.95 for 5 or more.

Agriculture

- A Directory of Farmers' Innovations in Ohio: A Farmer-to-Farmer Networking Tool.* Compiled and edited by Kamyar Enshayan, Deb Stinner, and Ben Stinner. 32 pp., tpls., 1991. Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio 43210.
- Cereal-Legume Cropping Systems: Nine Farm Case Studies in the Dryland Northern Plains, Canadian Prairies, and Intermountain Northwest.* By Nancy Matheson, Barbara Rusmore, James R. Sims, Michael Spengler, and E. L. Michalson. 75 pp., illus., tpls., 1991. Alternative Energy Resources Organization, Helena, Montana 59601. \$6.00 postpaid; \$5.00 for three or more; \$1.00 discount AERO members.
- Conservation Tillage Systems and Management Handbook, MWPS-45.* 1992. Midwest Plan Service, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011-3080.
- Sustainable Agriculture Resources: Books, Videos, Periodicals, Internships, and Apprenticeships.* Compiled and edited by Ken Rineer, Michelle Miller, and Marlys Halstead. 36 pp., illus., 1991. Sustainable Agriculture Program, Madison, Wisconsin 53707-7883.
- Sustainable Agriculture for California: A Guide to Information.* By Steve Mitchell. 198 pp., 1991. ANR Publications, University of California, Oakland, California 94608-1239. \$12.00.

Bibliographies

- BRG/Bibliography: An Indexed Guide to Environmental Statistics on Electronic Media.* 1991. Business Resources Group, Inc., Takoma Park, Maryland 20912. \$125.00.
- Geraghty & Miller's Groundwater*

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