

Leopold, Aldo

ALDO LEOPOLD (1887–1948) was an American wildlife biologist. Over a forty-year career, Leopold made fundamental contributions to conservation policy and philosophy, the environmental sciences, and the natural resource management professions. As an early proponent of the need to adopt an ecological perspective, he played a pivotal role in expanding the scope of the conservation movement. As a forester, wildlife manager, scientist, writer, educator, and advocate, he worked to instill that perspective among both his professional colleagues and the general public.

Leopold was born and raised in Burlington, Iowa. Inspired by the early American conservation movement, he chose a career in forestry. In 1909 he received his master's degree in forestry from Yale University and joined the U.S. Forest Service.

From 1909 to 1924 he served as a field officer and administrator in the national forests of the American Southwest. Concern over the effects of soil erosion prompted him to undertake basic studies of the environmental impact of forest management practices in the semiarid Southwest. He also directed a region-wide game protection movement that made wildlife conservation a higher priority not only in the Southwest but throughout the U.S. Forest Service.

Redefining conservation

In the early 1920s Leopold began his life-long efforts to protect America's remaining wilderness lands. As a leading spokesman for what became known as the wilderness

idea, he articulated the recreational, cultural, historical, and scientific value of wildlands. His work led to the designation in 1924 of the Gila Wilderness Area



Aldo Leopold Memorial Reserve, Baraboo, Wisconsin. With simple binoculars in a reclaimed tool shed, Leopold pondered the pursuit of "a refined taste in natural objects." In attempting to share his appreciation of the natural world, he wondered "how to bring about a striving for harmony with land among a people many of whom have forgotten there is any such thing as land, among whom education and culture have become almost synonymous with landlessness."

within New Mexico's Gila National Forest, the first such area in the world to be so designated.

Leopold left the Forest Service in 1928 to devote himself to the emerging field of game (and later wildlife) management. He undertook a three-year survey of game populations, habitat conditions, and management needs in the American Midwest. Through this work, he began to lay the foundations of wildlife management as a distinct profession. At the time, wildlife conservation consisted largely of legal restrictions on hunting, predator control, ad hoc establishment of refuges, and the captive rearing and release of game animals. By contrast, Leopold's approach emphasized the protection, restoration, and management of habitat so that game and other forms of wildlife could perpetuate themselves.

As the philosophy of ecology matured in the 1930s, Leopold and other U.S. scientists and conservationists faced a variety of environmental dilemmas, including the devastating conditions in the Dust Bowl on the western plains. In response, Leopold's early management focus on forests and game animals broadened to include all members of what he called "the biotic community," as well as the ecological processes characteristic of healthy land. He began to redefine conservation as "a state of health in the land."

Spreading the message

Leopold clarified and disseminated these ideas through his leadership in more than a hundred scientific, professional, and conservation organizations, including The Wilderness Society and The Wildlife Society, which he helped establish in 1935 and 1937 respectively. After World War II he was an adviser to the International Scientific Conference on the Conservation and Utilization of Resources, sponsored by the United Nations. In addition to two books that appeared in his lifetime, Leopold published more than five hundred articles, essays, scientific papers, reviews, and editorials on a wide range of conservation-related topics. In the early 1940s he began to compose a series of literary essays describing his field experiences as a naturalist and his

concerns as a conservationist. With the posthumous publication of these essays as *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*, his ideas began to reach a broader audience. In *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold combined the voices of the scientist, historian, poet, and philosopher to produce what has often been described as "the bible of the environmental movement."

In one of Leopold's best-known essays, "The Land Ethic," he argues that the ecological perspective required that the concept of community be expanded "to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land." Under this expanded concept, simple utilitarian standards no longer sufficed to gauge decent land use. A "land ethic" was needed to guide people in their land relations, and to affirm the right of other members of the community "to continued existence, and, at least in spots, their continued existence in a natural state." He concluded that individuals should "examine each question in terms of what is ethically and esthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

Leopold died on April 21, 1948, suffering a heart attack while fighting a grass fire on a neighbor's farm in Wisconsin.

See also: Conservation Movement, U.S.; Equity; Five E's; Land Use; Restoration Ecology; Sustainable Development; Wilderness Experience.

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