

And both might have appreciated the words of Kiowa poet and writer N. Scott Momaday from his essay "A First American Views His Land."

As an Indian I think: "You say that I *use* the land, and I reply, yes, it is true; but it is not the first truth. The first truth is that I *love* the land; I see that it is beautiful; I delight in it; I am alive in it."

Over these last twenty-five years, much has changed in this world that we are alive in; in our culture, politics, and economy; and in the ways we conservationists go about our work and our relationships. When we gathered in Iowa back then, the Midwestern farm crisis was rippling painfully over the surrounding countryside; the new compound word "biodiversity" had just been coined; the endangered northern spotted owl was becoming a symbol and scapegoat; a deep drought would soon come to the Midwest and sweeping fires to Yellowstone; and climate change was a matter of gathering data and concern and consensus, not of automatic ideological assault. We were wrestling with conservation challenges old and new, pausing to celebrate the positive accomplishments that Leopold inspired, even as we sought fresh pathways beyond the environmentalism of the time.

To read these essays now is to see that, however much has indeed changed, the core themes—in Leopold's experience and in our collective efforts to be better members of the land community—endure: the varied lessons we derive from ecology, the diverse values we discover in the wild, our need for a new and restorative agriculture, and the challenge of making the land ethic meaningful in an increasingly complex political and economic world that is also increasingly divorced from the land. To read the Leopold family's personal recollections of Aldo is to be reminded that, however great and abstract these themes seem, we explore them through the very real places and people with whom we share our lives. And how we go about our explorations reveals who we are. "Always Dad tried to be persuasive," daughter Nina recalls. "He had a very basic respect for other people's thoughts and never lashed out."

Now, twenty-five years on in the life of this particular collection, we turn our eyes forward again. We wonder what the next quarter century will bring. We wonder what the next generation will face and how we can best prepare them. So, for the younger readers of this book: I hope these essays will give you a sense of continuity and of foundations. I hope they won't seem too dated—and if they occasionally do, that that in itself will demonstrate that you are the inheritors of an ongoing, multigenerational effort to build a durable land ethic. You are the next to forge on into "the Unknown Future," to become the land's, to follow the first truth: to love the land, to see that it is beautiful, to delight in it, to be alive in it... along with the cranes, and the monarchs, and the tides.

Curt Meine

## Foreword

Twenty-five years have passed since these essays and reflections on Aldo Leopold were first published—a rather remarkable fact to absorb for those of us who contributed to this volume and the gathering that precipitated it. Twenty-five times around the sun. One human generation. Four or five sandhill crane generations. One hundred monarch butterfly generations. Eighteen thousand high tides and eighteen thousand low tides. Forty-five more parts per million of atmospheric carbon dioxide. Two billion more people.

The earth, its soils and waters, all its diverse expressions of life, and all our interdependent lives upon it spin on together. I cannot help but recall a line from one of Leopold's early manuscripts: "...the privilege of possessing the earth entails the responsibility of passing it on, the better for our use, not only to immediate posterity, but to the Unknown Future, the nature of which is not given us to know."

I wonder, had Leopold revised that passage, if he might have shifted in his own sense of just who possesses what. I wonder if he might have nodded in assent to Robert Frost's opening line in "The Gift Outright": "The land was ours before we were the land's." Frost and Leopold could have carried on quite a conversation. Frost, later in the same poem, said,

Something we were withholding made us weak  
 Until we found out that it was ourselves  
 We were withholding from our land of living,  
 And forthwith found salvation in surrender.

Leopold, in his foreword to *A Sand County Almanac*, wrote,

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.