

Five things everyone should know about . . .

A Sand County Almanac

By Curt Meine MS'83 PhD'88 and Stanley Temple

- 1 **Aldo Leopold's book *A Sand County Almanac* was published 70 years ago.** But its message about our relationship with nature is more important now than ever. Written from 1933 to 1948, when Leopold was a professor of wildlife management in the University of Wisconsin College of Agriculture (now CALS), his collection of essays introduced a "land ethic" as a moral compass for how humans should live on the Earth. For Leopold, "land" encompassed "soil, water, plants, animals, and people," and he advocated for an ethical relationship with each and all, collectively.
- 2 **The original manuscript for *A Sand County Almanac* was rejected by several publishers.** They thought that such a book would have limited readership, in part because it introduced ideas that were ahead of their time. Publishers generally liked the engaging essays in the first half of the book, which describe seasonal events at Leopold's "shack" — his weekend getaway on a worn-out farm in Sauk County, Wisconsin. But they balked at the more thought-provoking essays on ecology and ethics in the book's second half.
- 3 **Leopold wouldn't live to see *A Sand County Almanac* in print.** On April 14, 1948, Oxford University Press informed Leopold that it wished to publish his manuscript. One week later, Leopold suffered a fatal heart attack while fighting a grass fire that had escaped from a neighbor's farm near the shack. In the months that followed, Leopold's son, Luna, took the lead in getting the manuscript, which was then called "Great Possessions," into print. Luna and Oxford eventually changed the name of the book to *A Sand County Almanac*.
- 4 ***A Sand County Almanac* became a classic with the emergence of the modern environmental movement.** Oxford published the book in the fall of 1949. It was widely and positively reviewed and well received by a core readership of conservationists. Sales remained modest, however, until 1968, when the first paperback edition appeared and helped inspire the rising environmental movement. Leopold's book has been translated into 14 languages and has sold more than two million copies. It continues to be widely read as an essential contribution to conservation thought.
- 5 **Leopold's transformative ideas are both timely and timeless.** His call for an ethic that recognizes our responsibilities to the land and to future generations provided a new philosophical foundation for conservation. Leopold could not fully anticipate the challenges now presented by climate change, biodiversity loss, and other pressing global issues. However, he held that an ethic to guide our relations with the natural world must continually evolve "in the minds of a thinking community." As he wrote in the foreword to the *Almanac*: "When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."

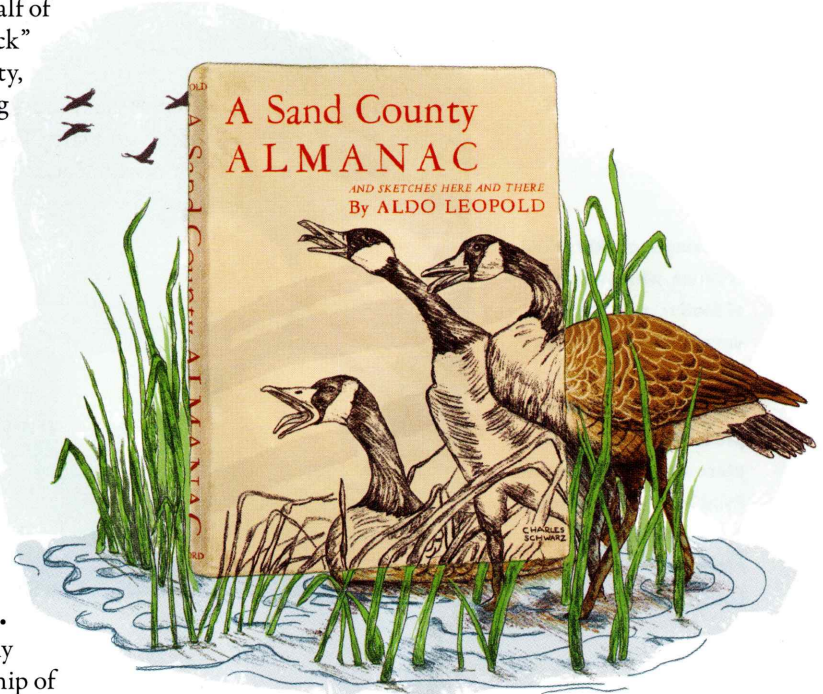


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