

Who Was Aldo Leopold? The Man, His Words, His Philosophy.

Dear readers,

Beginning with today's column, I plan to be writing about the words and philosophy of Aldo Leopold about once a month. I am inspired to do this first by my great affection for his philosophy as it pertains to man and nature, and also by my friend and mentor Steve Nelle, who is also a great fan of Aldo Leopold and who writes periodic "Lessons from Leopold" articles in the Texas Wildlife Magazine.

I want to begin in this column to describe who Aldo Leopold was and a bit of his history.

Most people who have heard of Aldo Leopold know him as the author of "A Sand County Almanac," which, if Leopold had done nothing else, would ensure his place among the greatest naturalists of the United States.

Aldo Leopold was a forester, a naturalist, a hunter, a conservationist, a scientist, a teacher, an expert on game management, an advocate for the conservation of soil, forests, grasslands, and wildlife, as well as a very accomplished writer and philosopher, all at the same time. He has been called the father of the science of game management, America's foremost conservationist and the most influential environmentalist of the 20th century.

Aldo Leopold was a highly skilled and experienced outdoorsman and hunter, a well-read and knowledgeable scientist and a prolific writer. It has often been said that Leopold's work should be placed on a par with the work of John Muir and Henry David Thoreau, but I believe that Leopold's accomplishments in terms of his philosophy of land management, educating the general public and public policy far exceed those of Muir and Thoreau.

Aldo Leopold was born in Burlington, Iowa on January 11, 1887 and attended public schools there until he was 16. He attended a prep school in New Jersey in 1904 and began studies at Yale in 1905. In 1909 he obtained his Masters degree in forestry and went to work for the newly-created U.S. Forest Service in Arizona and New Mexico.

In 1911 he became deputy supervisor of the Carson National Forest in northern New Mexico.

After turning down several previous opportunities for advancement, which would have required him to move to Washington, he accepted a position as assistant director of the Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin in 1924.

Leopold left the Forest Service in 1928 to conduct game surveys for nine Midwestern states and published a book-length summary of his surveys in 1931. He also lectured on game management at the University of Wisconsin. In 1933 his book "Game Management" was published, the first textbook ever published on the subject and still regarded as a classic.

In 1935 Leopold was a co-founder of the Wilderness Society

From the 1930s until his death Leopold served on numerous Boards, commissions, panels, etc., of a variety of state and national governments and NGO's. He also wrote over 500 articles and essays on various topics having to do with nature and land management, which make up the bulk of his writings

In 1944 Leopold submitted a manuscript of essays on ecology to a publisher who eventually rejected it in 1947. In December of 1947 he resubmitted a revised version to Oxford University Press, which notified him of acceptance to publish "A Sand County Almanac" on April 14, 1948. A week later, on April 21, 1948 Aldo Leopold died of a heart attack while fighting a fire on a neighbor's farm; he was 61 years old. "A Sand County Almanac" was published in the fall of 1949.

In his Forward to "A Sand County Almanac," Leopold wrote:

"There are some who can live without wild things, and some who cannot. These essays are the delights and dilemmas of one who cannot.

"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 wild and free."

I only wish I had the writing talent that Leopold had.

For any reader who bothers to read my columns with any regularity, I suspect your interest in nature is such that you would really very much enjoy reading "A Sand County Almanac." Paperback copies are widely available for less than \$ 10.

Until next time...

Jim Stanley is a Texas Master Naturalist and the author of the books "Hill Country Ecology," "Hill Country Landowner's Guide" and "A Beginner's Handbook for Rural Texas Landowners." He can be reached at jstmn@ktc.com. Previous columns can be seen at www.hillcountrynaturalist.org.