

Aldo Leopold

[Environment](#), [Nature](#)



" We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, or otherwise have faith in" (Erdmann Paragraph 5), one of the most renowned fathers of wildlife ecology, Aldo Leopold, so famously declared in his important non-fiction book, A Sand County Almanac. From his extensive studies of the environment, Leopold created the idea of the " land ethic", which called for citizens of the global community to include the " land" with its soil, plants, animals and waters as part of the ecological community worthy of the respect and moral consideration of humans. Leopold stressed the importance of breaking the previously impenetrable barrier between man and nature by including the land as part of the community, and by developing an ethical relation and spiritual connection to the land because the land is as much part of the cycle of life and a part of the community as humans are. Leopold's ecological interpretation of the relationship between humans and nature have caused him to convince many have the immense value and beauty of nature, and the importance of the preservation of wilderness. One of Leopold's most important contributions to the conservation movement was the development of the concept of the " land ethic" which must first be defined in order to understand Leopold's basic argument in favor of protecting the wilderness and nature. One of the first premises of this concept is the presumption that humans are co-members of the global community instead of conquerors of the different members of the community. According to Leopold, " The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals..." (Leopold 129) and thus, as co-members of this community, we should respect all other constituents of the community as we would

respect other members of the human race. Thus, to Leopold, fostering this "land ethic" means changing our "loyalties, affections, and convictions" (Leopold 129) to include the land and build a spiritual connection with a land. This basic respect for fellow members of the community is the essence of the "land ethic" whose basic principle can be summarized in a single statement: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong if it tends otherwise." (Leopold 133) This principle suggests that humans are deeply embedded in human and ecological communities, and should reevaluate our loyalties and morals to include the land and the rest of the non-human community. Leopold's main argument was that humans should extend their ethical spheres to include the "land", and made forest and wilderness preservation necessary for any adequate environmental ethic or policy. Leopold made the "land" not only of instrumental or utilitarian value to humans, but valuable in its own right. Humans were thus "ecological beings" who were not conquerors of the community, but co-members of the community along with the land, and thus were obligated to respect other non-human members of the community as well. However, the fostering of a love for the land requires much energy and effort on the part of humans. Leopold stated that it was "inconceivable" to him that an "ethical relation to land could exist without love, respect, and admiration for land" (Leopold 132). The development of this "ecological conscience" was important because the land, valuable in its own right, was deserving of moral consideration on the part of humans, and was deserving of the utmost respect from them. The preservation of the "integrity, diversity, and beauty" (Leopold 131) of ecological communities should even,

at times, trump human freedoms and human values of self-interest. To Leopold, the barrier between nature and man was then broken and all members, human and non-human, within the biotic community was just a incessant flow of energy which needed to be sustained in order to make life on Earth as habitable as possible, and thus, all members of the biotic community were deserving of equal respect and consideration from humans, who had the mental capacities to make distinctions between different members from the community. The idea of the "land ethic" has thus changed the human concept of what deserves moral consideration. Humans, capable of reasoning and rationalizing, are endowed with the mental functions capable of distinguishing between what is right and wrong, and what is deserving of their time and energy, and Leopold made the preservation of the "land" part of what deserved the time and energy of humans. The land, the waters, and the soil are as much a part of this Earth as are humans, and should be treated with the same respect humans treat other humans. Leopold transcended the traditional view of ethics, which placed humans as conquerors of the community, by making them co-members of the community, and made the other members of the ecological community morally relevant. The role of emotion and sympathy would thus be changed, extending to these non-human members of the community, not only to our fellow human beings. Leopold stated, "That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but the land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics." The perpetuation of the health of the land depends on how much we can view the land as being deserving of our consideration and respect, and how much time we are willing to allot to the care of the

land so it can flourish. Aldo Leopold has made wilderness preservation at the core of any environmental or ecologically related issue. The conservation of the environment on the part of humans was a necessity, because humans and the land shared a special connection with one another in that they were both members of the community of equal status. Leopold immediately rejected any concept that did not put ecological awareness at the forefront due to his concept of the "land ethic." Leopold also suggested that one does not need to be formally trained in ecology in order to fully appreciate the value that wilderness and forests everywhere harbor, which further emphasizes the point that every human being really needs to try to respect the environment in order to really see the beauty of it. Works Cited Leopold, Aldo: *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There*, 1948, Oxford University Press, New York, 1987, pp. 129-133. Erdmann, J. (1997, December 4). Who was Aldo Leopold?. <http://www.naturenet.com/alnc/aldo.html>