

Finding Leopold

TAKE TIME TO READ A CLASSIC IN THE FIELD.

Ron Weber

I was first introduced to Aldo Leopold at the age of 18. It was the final quarter of my senior year and I was in the St. Joseph's High School library in Kenosha searching for a book to do a report for Honor's English. Suffering from "senioritis," I hoped to find a thin book that I could get through quickly and be done with as painlessly as possible.

I noticed this book with a nature scene, a sunset over water with geese flying. "A Sand County Almanac" was the title and as I flipped it over I read the words, "There are some who can live without wild things and some who cannot." As someone who was very interested in nature and hunting I decided to take a look as this book showed promise on two fronts — pretty thin and about nature.

As fate would have it, I just happened to open the book to a page titled "October." I read the first few lines of "Smoky Gold," an essay on grouse hunting. Figuring it must be a book about hunting, I excitedly checked it out. Little did I know at the time that this thin book that I thought was no more than an easy way out of an assignment would be a lifelong companion and come to change the way I viewed nature and my place in it.

I must confess that I did not read the entire book but enough to get a good grade on my book report. More importantly, seeds of Leopold's thinking were planted in the recesses of my brain, but like all seeds, it would take time and cultivating to realize the lasting fruits.

I read the book again four years later while getting my forestry degree from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. At that time, I was more ready for the deeper meanings that Leopold so poetically expressed. Since then I have read it many times, each time learning both more of what Leopold was trying to say about the land and our relationship to it and how

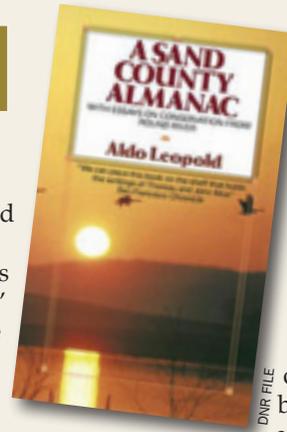
much my thinking had changed since I last read it.

Much of what Leopold writes about in "A Sand County Almanac" is as relevant today as when he first wrote it almost 70 years ago, maybe more so. One of his central themes is that we abuse land, comprised of all the living and nonliving pieces, because we see it as something that belongs to us instead of a community to which we belong. It takes a little humility to admit that is true and even more responsibility to care that it is true.

Leopold was an avid hunter and fisherman. He is definitely one of the more eloquent spokespersons our outdoor sports have ever known. It would be a great idea for any one of us to take a break and pick up a copy of "A Sand County Almanac" this weekend, this month or this year.

Almost all of our most pressing environmental issues are of our own making. As a society it would certainly benefit us if more people would read Leopold and as he said "let their minds work the while." All one would really have to do is read the first three pages of the forward to get more than one usually gleans out of an entire book. In it Leopold writes, "Our bigger and better society is now like a hypochondriac, so obsessed with its own economic health as to have lost the capacity to remain healthy." That sounds like it could have been written yesterday.

The Aldo Leopold Foundation, located in Baraboo near the site of Leopold's famous shack does a magnificent job of spreading Leopold's message not only throughout the state but the world. The Leopold Center is a shining example of smart construction demonstrating en-



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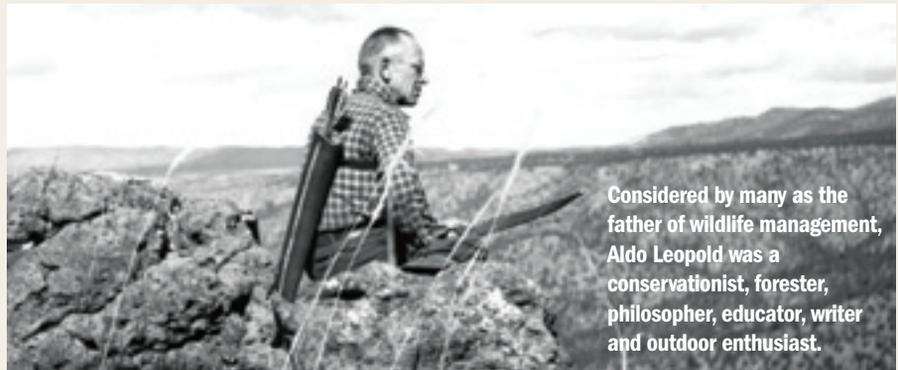
ergy efficiency and use of alternative energies. Wood from the very trees Leopold and his family planted was used in the construction of parts of the Leopold Center.

The shack, once a worn out farm that was nursed back to health by Leopold and his family, should be on everyone's list as a place to visit. The feeling one gets when walking the same paths Leopold did or sitting outside his shack listening to the wind singing in the pines that he planted can best be described as spiritual. Guided or self-guided tours of both the shack and the Leopold Center are available. Call the Aldo Leopold Foundation or visit their website at aldo-leopold.org for details.

Since it was signed into law by Gov. Jim Doyle in 2004, the first weekend in March is designated Aldo Leopold Weekend. Leopold is often referred to as the "father of conservation" and is recognized worldwide as one of the most influential people in terms of stewardship of the land. Leopold Weekend events are scheduled at various locations across the state throughout March and even into early summer. A listing of event sites and dates can be found at the Aldo Leopold Foundation website.

Try to attend one of these events or if nothing else, just get a copy of the book to read on your own. If reading a book is not for you, simply Google Aldo Leopold quotes and see if you may find, like an 18-year-old I once knew, some seeds of wonder. It is never too late for those seeds, once planted, to bear a lasting fruit.

Ron Weber writes from Weyerhaeuser.



Considered by many as the father of wildlife management, Aldo Leopold was a conservationist, forester, philosopher, educator, writer and outdoor enthusiast.

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>>> Aldo Leopold Weekend 2016 in Wisconsin is March 4-6 • Visit aldoleopold.org/AldoLeopold/weekend.shtml.