

Originally published at the Anthropology Review Database:
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2011 Green Fire: Aldo Leopold and a Land Ethic for Our
Time. Oley, PA: [Bullfrog Films](#).

Notes: DVD, 57 minutes

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Medium: *Film/Video*

Subject *Leopold, Aldo, - 1886-1948*
Keywords: *Ecologists - United States - Biography*
Naturalists - Wisconsin - Biography
Conservationists - Wisconsin - Biography
Environmentalism
Nature conservation
Conservationists

ABSTRACT: Aldo Leopold is not only an example of an important scientist who had a tremendous role in establishing the discipline of wildlife management and land conservation, but he was also the author of the massively popular *A Sand County Almanac* (1949). Much like Margaret Mead, his contributions go beyond academics to have a serious impact a wide variety of disciplines on the academic level and important input in the language of our daily lives.

The film follows Aldo Leopold's birth in Burlington, Iowa, through his education at Yale and his early career at the Apache National Forest in the Apache Territory. He would later become a professor at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, where he would have a tremendous impact on the emerging disciplines of wildlife management, forestry, and conservation. He bought 80 acres in central Wisconsin, near Baraboo, where he built a cabin and spent a great deal of time with his family enjoying the outdoors. In 1948 he died while struggling to contain a controlled burn that got out of hand on a neighbor's property.

Interviews with his immediate family and friends are blended with black and white photographs, weaving a narrative of a man who had a passion for wilderness that fits the image of a Henry David Thoreau

naturalist. What makes Leopold's enjoyment of nature different is that it was not individualistic solitude. He shared his love of nature with his family and neighbors, as well as in his writing and career. He was a public figure who conceived of nature not as the refuge for individualistic freedom but a space that needs to be socially protected and preserved.

A great deal of this narrative is presented by Leopold's biographer Curt Meine, and in many ways this film is a distillation of that biography (Meine 1988). The film is often more interested in the personality of Leopold, and as such the result is a more personable film. While such a film is of great interest I felt that the substance of Leopold's ideas about conservation management often took a back seat to the presentation of Leopold's passion for nature and conservation. The importance of his ideas about conservation management cannot be understated. They form the foundation to the modern understanding of the practice and were revolutionary if only for the fact that they stood in the face of the idea that it was inevitable that human activity would alter the environment and ecosystems in irreversible ways. With the United States' version of liberal democracy, and its strong tradition of the total right to exploit private property in anyway an owner sees fit, Leopold had to work hard to show that conserving the land was in our own best interests and that land ownership was a right *and* a responsibility.

Leopold is an important figure in the environmental movement because he argued that the destruction of nature is not inevitable. We can maintain biodiversity and we can modify the landscape with our agriculture, housing, and recreation as well. The promotion of these ideas as an ethical responsibility is nothing short of a paradigm shift. For a look at what a land ethic was like before Leopold, one needs look no further than Appalachia, an area that is still exploited without remorse.

This film is a historical biography, but it sits comfortably within the space of a social action film. There are interviews with environmental activists, from Arizona ranchers to Chicago urban ecologists, that underscore the importance of environmental conservation as an awareness necessary for avoiding self-destruction in our ongoing relationship with the environment. I would recommend this film for introductory college courses in environmental sciences, as well as high school science and biology courses. It is also of considerable interest to public library collections as well.

References cited:

Leopold, Aldo 1949 *A Sand County Almanac*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Meine, Curt 1988 *Aldo Leopold: His Life and Work*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.