



WISCONSIN'S
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VOICES FOR CONSERVATION

Spring 2021

NEWSLETTER

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The Evolving Land Ethic:

Conservation in a Time of Social and Environmental Crisis

By Curt Meine, Aldo Leopold Foundation
[reprinted from TheConversation.com]

The Foundation provides followup to this article: <https://www.aldoleopold.org/about/land-ethics-and-social-justice/>.

An ongoing reckoning with race in American history has drawn attention to racism in the environmental movement. Critiques have focused on themes such as forced removal of Indigenous peoples from ancestral lands, early conservationists' support for eugenics, and the chronic lack of diversity in environmental organizations.

They also have scrutinized the racial views of key figures such as John Muir and Theodore Roosevelt. Critics argue that these men valued pristine lands but cared little about poor and Indigenous people who occupied them.

Some observers say the same about Aldo Leopold, born January 11, 1887. Leopold was a prominent conservationist who wore many hats—author, philosopher, forester, naturalist, scientist, ecologist, teacher. Because he was devoted to protecting wilderness and also expressed concern about the social and ecological impacts of human population growth, detractors have called him a callous misanthrope at best and racist at worst.

As a Leopold biographer, conservationist, and historian, I think this argument misses the mark. It's true that Leopold did not fully acknowledge the historic trauma of Native American dispossession and genocide, nor explicitly recognize how the impacts of land

exploitation fell disproportionately on the poor and on Black and Indigenous people and people of color. But he came to believe that Western ethical frameworks had to expand to embrace land, as he wrote in his book *A Sand County Almanac*, as "a community to which we belong." He called this idea "the land ethic."



Art credit: Terry Daulton

Caring for land and people

Aldo Leopold was a transformative figure in the evolution of conservation in the U.S. and globally. Trained as a forester, he contributed to the development of fields ranging from soil conservation and wildlife ecology to environmental history and ecological economics.

Early in his career, while working for the U.S. Forest Service in the 1920s, Leopold argued for protecting roadless public wildlands—what would come to be designated as wilderness four decades later—as a novel form of land use.

Automobiles were just entering the landscape, and the federal government had begun funding road and highway

Aldo Leopold: continued on page 9

President's Message

Photo credit: Jeff Wilson



A Portrait of Good Lives

By Terry Daulton

There was a hint of spring in the late afternoon breeze as we crunched along the bay ice behind our cabin. The March sun, well above the horizon at 5 p.m. added to that feeling of change in the air. Under a big pine, I spotted a dark shape, colors not matching the snow or recently exposed forest floor. It was an eagle—lifeless and still. Its soft feathers and bright yellow feet surprised me with their beauty. Sadness welled up. I felt a strange tenderness for it—was it one of our resident pair of eagles, the neighbors we have shared so many seasons with? I carried it back to our cabin and laid it on the porch.

Sometimes grief comes out unexpectedly. Earlier in March, I had stood at the shore of Lake Superior sprinkling tobacco in memory of Joe Rose, an old friend and tribal elder from Bad River. I met Joe in the late 1970s when he taught Native American Studies at Northland College. He introduced me and many other youth to Ojibwe world views. Joe is revered as a tribal elder, storyteller, mentor, and historian. I will always remember him for his ready smile and welcoming personality. I recall a tour he gave me of the museum he designed and built at Northland. He shared both a pride in his heritage and a generous offering of teachings.

More recently, we lost John Spangberg, a Wisconsin's Green Fire member, WDNR retiree, and husband to Nancy Larson, our assistant director. John contributed to many projects, including our work on the EIS and permits for Enbridge's Line 5 pipeline in northern Wisconsin. John's legacy is a lifetime of conservation leadership. John is remembered by colleagues and friends as knowledgeable, honorable, and often irreverent and funny. I saw him many times behind Nancy's Zoom camera, slipping past our meeting screens as he kept the wood fire burning. His deep understanding of watersheds, landscapes, and permit processes will be missed by WGF.

Neither John nor Joe Rose are globally known figures like Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, or Greta Thunberg, but they represent the best of us. While we all know that our time on Earth is transitory, we tend to forget, wrapping ourselves up in unimportant daily routines until life sends a "cosmic boot" to force us to remember what makes the "good life." To me the good life is purposeful, based on love and dedication, and includes a healthy dose of fun. I think John Spangberg and Joe Rose set powerful examples of how to live that life. Knowing that with certainty tempers my sadness at losing them. I feel grateful to have known them.

This morning I brought the eagle in from the porch and laid it near my easel. Later today we will drop it off at the ranger station for analysis. Part of me would rather return it to the foot of that tall pine where a passing fox might make a meal. But its fate is to feed science. First, however, I will sketch the powerful beak and feet, and make a portrait to honor the lives of all those who leave a conservation legacy.

Wisconsin's Green Fire: Voices for Conservation

Mission

Wisconsin's Green Fire supports the conservation legacy of Wisconsin by promoting science-based management of Wisconsin's natural resources.

Vision

Wisconsin's citizens understand and support scientific and thoughtful long-term management of natural resources, and value the many benefits of clean water, clean air, and healthy ecosystems.

Values

- We honor our strong and robust conservation heritage in Wisconsin.
- We believe that public policy, laws, and natural resource management should be informed by objective scientific understanding.
- We believe that robust and independent scientific research, knowledge, and education are necessary foundations for a fair and prosperous society.
- We are dedicated to the principle that all people and groups in our society have the right to clean water, clean air, healthy natural ecosystems, outdoor recreation, and land managed sustainably to produce economic benefit to everyone. We are dedicated to the principle that a sound environment and economy go hand in hand. We are dedicated to environmental justice.
- We support transparent governmental decision-making and fair and just treatment of all sides of issues.
- Our actions challenge policy makers to think beyond the short term and to act on behalf of future generations.

Wisconsin's Green Fire: Voices for Conservation

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From the Executive Director

Spring into WGF Conservation!

By Fred Clark

Spring weather is bringing more and more people out-of-doors, relieved to enjoy time with friends and all the signs of spring. Meanwhile, Wisconsin's Green Fire members and staff are becoming a stronger voice contributing to conservation-positive outcomes on many issues.

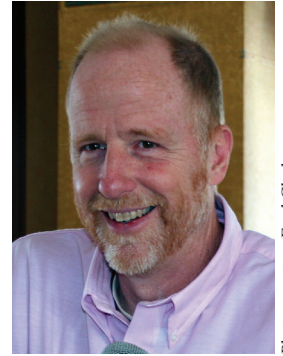


Photo courtesy Fred Clark

As you read this, we will have released our assessment of the Wisconsin February 2021 wolf hunt and the unintended consequences caused by a rushed, chaotic process that prevented even a minimal role for good science or public comment. Our recap of the hunt will be posted on the WGF website. More information will be shared as the process to update the state's Wolf Management Plan proceeds.

We're continuing to produce our *Opportunities Now* series for 2021–2023. These in-depth analyses of key conservation issues help educate policy makers, agency staff, and citizens, and create a playbook for better outcomes. (See page 4 for a capsule summary of our *Opportunities Now* papers on wolves, PFAS, and Energy Policy with links for downloading.)

We'll be issuing two new *Opportunities Now* papers shortly:

- Our Public Trust and Wetlands Work Group is at work on an assessment of the "Waters of the United States" rules that govern the protection of Wisconsin wetlands and water bodies and that will chart a course for protecting them for all their benefits.
- Our Wildlife Work Group is leading an assessment on the conservation needs for a Wisconsin white-tailed deer population threatened by Chronic Wasting Disease, as well as the conservation needs of the habitats that support deer, and trends in hunting participation that are affecting our ability to manage this species.

As part of our work on climate change, WGF is preparing to launch a multi-partner effort to support climate-resiliency planning at county and local levels. We'll share more about our "Climate Readiness and Rural Economic Opportunity Assessment" pilot in future communications.

As always, behind our public-facing work, Wisconsin's Green Fire members are engaged continually behind the scenes to support pro-conservation outcomes with our colleagues in state and local government, members of the Evers' administration, and partner organizations. That relationship-based work creates some of our most significant impacts and is what makes WGF a truly unique organization.

WGF staff extend our special thanks to YOU, our members, board, and leaders, for making that work possible. I hope your time outdoors this spring is restorative and inspiring!



Photo courtesy Adrian Wydevon

Dive Deep with WGF on Conservation Issues

Read *Opportunities Now* Reports 2021-2023

Wisconsin's Green Fire is publishing separate reports on priority issues in our *Opportunities Now 2.0* series. Each report summarizes an analysis of current literature, interviews with agency staff and experts, and the consensus recommendations of experts. Three reports are completed and are posted on WGF's website. WGF Science Director Sarah Peterson has led the development of these reports in collaboration with WGF's subject matter experts.

Creating a Shared Vision for Wolves in Wisconsin

Released: November 30, 2020

The removal of the gray wolf from the federal endangered species list [which happened in January 2021] places wolf management back in the hands of state managers. Our *Shared Vision for Wolves* report outlines a new wolf conservation plan, policies, and legislation to provide conservation for this iconic species. It recommends the immediate revision of the state's wolf conservation plan, creating an inclusive and transparent wolf governance process that includes public perceptions and respects tribal cultural views, and incorporates sound conservation science in guiding management.

<https://wigreenfire.org/creating-a-shared-vision-for-wolves-in-wisconsin-wisconsins-green-fire-opportunities-now-2021-2023-report-on-wolves/>

PFAS: Forever Chemicals in Wisconsin

Released: January 28, 2021

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are linked to many human health issues including the risk of some cancers and fertility issues. This report includes routes of exposure, health effects, and known releases of PFAS in the state. It recommends improved environmental management of PFAS grounded in the latest science and methods to reduce exposure and devise clean-up procedures for spills.

<https://wigreenfire.org/pfas-forever-chemicals-in-wisconsin-wisconsins-green-fire-opportunities-now-2021-2023-report-pfas/>

The Future is Now: Creating a 21st Century Energy Policy

Released: March 3, 2021

An updated energy policy would reduce dependence on large fossil-fueled power plants and establish a Wisconsin energy system that is cleaner, more reliable, and increasingly decentralized with local generation and local ownership of power sources. The report recommends mechanisms to better control power demand, reduce carbon emissions, and involve the public and stakeholders in energy-related decisions.

<https://wigreenfire.org/creating-a-21st-century-energy-policy/>

These two *Opportunities Now* reports are on the horizon:

- **Wetlands and Waterways in Wisconsin: Navigating Changes to the Federal Waters of the United States (WOTUS) Rule**
- **The Future of Deer in Wisconsin**

View these 90-minute webinars—if you missed their debut, they are posted on WGF's website:

- **Conservation Policy in the Biden Administration**

Collin O'Mara, National Wildlife Federation speaks about the agenda for climate, land and water conservation, and environmental justice in the new administration.

Recorded on: February 10, 2021

View at: <https://wigreenfire.org/conservation-policy-in-the-biden-harris-administration-feb-10-2021-webinar/>

- **PFAS: Past, Present, and Future—Forever Chemicals in Wisconsin**

Several panelists share the history, fate, and transport of these chemicals.

Recorded on February 25, 2021

View at: <https://wigreenfire.org/pfas-forever-chemicals-in-wisconsin/>

- **The Future is Now: Creating a 21st Century Energy Policy in Wisconsin**

Panelists discuss opportunities for Wisconsin to chart a path toward an energy system that is cleaner, more reliable, more equitable, and increasingly decentralized.

Recorded on March 31, 2021

Check our website for the recording—we need a little time to upload it following the March 31 webinar.



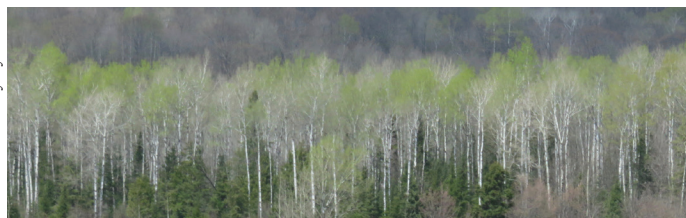
Stewardship Program and the State Budget

By Paul Heinen, WGF Legislative Liaison

Governor Tony Evers' state budget sets a landmark in funding proposals for environmental equity and program initiatives aimed at protecting state lands and waters. A few highlights include increases in funding for water programs, PFAS regulation and testing, creation of an Office of Environmental Justice, energy and climate priorities, and flood prevention.

It is noteworthy that the budget includes many of the ideas and recommendations that our staff and Wisconsin's Green Fire members have promoted during the past few months. We have also appreciated the opportunities to engage in policy discussions with administration officials. Covering all the proposed initiatives would run far beyond this column, but we would like to focus on one issue that receives bi-partisan support—the reauthorization of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program.

Photo credit: Lucy Tyrrell



Since 1989, the Stewardship Program has protected our forests, parks, wild spaces, and natural areas across the state. The governor's budget includes a ten-year extension of the program running through 2032, along with an increase from \$32 million to \$70 million per year—more than doubling this fund and its possibilities for additional land protection for the benefit of Wisconsin citizens, both humans and wild living things.

We are working closely with Gathering Waters: Wisconsin's Alliance for Land Trusts and other organizations across the state to support the reauthorization of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program. Gathering Waters has developed a simple and novel way to get involved. Consider contacting your Wisconsin state legislators in support of the program by creating a personalized postcard at <https://knowlesnelson.org/take-action/>. You can upload a photo, create a message, and it will be sent to your state legislators.

In the coming months, we will update you on the progress of the state budget including the status of the Stewardship Fund.

Larger Required Minimum Distributions in 2021—consider giving and saving (in taxes)

By Bob Gurda, WGF Treasurer

Wisconsin's Green Fire has a lot to be thankful for, especially our dedicated volunteers and donors. Thanks to your generosity, we ended our fiscal year well, despite uncertainties in a year of COVID-19.

In our last newsletter, I wrote about creative giving. Here, I cover a few insights into giving through a tax-deferred retirement account. If this topic is too in-the-weeds for you, my feelings won't be hurt. But some of you may find the nuances of such economics as intriguing as how Canada jays can cache food for later benefit. *Warning!* A shameless pitch for donations lies ahead.

Required Minimum Distribution—A Primer

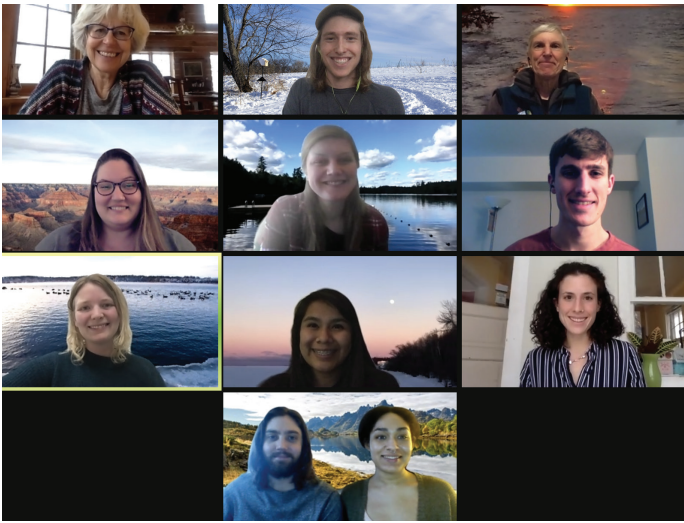
All those holding a traditional IRA, 401(k), TSA-403(b), or Deferred Compensation-457 will reach the age to take an annual Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) and deal with the tax consequences. Those in this situation may be surprised that their RMD is larger than expected in 2021.

There are several reasons for this. First, many accounts had net increases during 2020, so the amount used to calculate the RMD is bigger. Also, as people age, the percentage they are required to distribute increases. Thirdly, last spring Congress passed a one-time suspension of the RMD for 2020. Those who opted out of the distribution ended up with a larger amount in their account.

The Ulterior Motive Revealed

Those fortunate enough to have these accounts may need to withdraw substantially more this year. Those who can afford to gift some or all of their RMD to WGF or another charity may be able to lower their taxes via a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) with zero income tax on the amount donated. If the account is not in an IRA, properly rolling over the account to take advantage of the tax-free gift should incur no taxes. Of course, be sure to discuss the details with your account manager.

We certainly appreciate WGF members who have donated through a QCD and encourage you to contact Fred Clark at fclark@wigreenfire.org to discuss a QCD or other gifts. But most of all, WGF is extremely grateful for all contributions, whether from a piggy bank, bitcoin stash, or QCD, and especially from those of you who give time and expertise—your work for natural resources is priceless!



Highlights of WGF's New Student and Young Professional Work Group

By Will Vuyk, SYP Work Group Chair

This past fall, the board of Wisconsin's Green Fire approved the formation of the Student and Young Professional Work Group. Instead of being centered around an issue or topic, our work group is centered around our audience—emerging professionals. Just as proper deer management and informed climate change action are vital to the sustainable future of our state's natural resources, so too is ensuring that there will be a connected, diverse, and passionate next generation of professionals to carry the torch. Our mission is to help connect students and young professionals with the expertise and experience of Wisconsin's Green Fire, developing relationships that will foster career advancement and ensure the continuation of Wisconsin's conservation legacy. We are excited to begin branching out and to connect with aspiring educators, communicators, researchers, policymakers, and natural resource professionals around the state. Our logo, modeled after a willow tree, reflects our "branching" goals.



One of our first initiatives is the publication of an email newsletter, *Conservation Connections*, designed to keep students and young professionals up-to-date on conservation issues and policy in Wisconsin. What will make *Conservation Connections* different from WGF's existing print newsletter and e-newsletter is that it will be sent primarily to non-members as a form of outreach. Through this newsletter, we aim not just to inform, but also to build a network of young professionals around Wisconsin's Green Fire. Zena Jensvold (see article next column) is just one of these young professionals.

WISCIENCE Fellow Works with Wisconsin's Green Fire on *Opportunities Now* Energy Report

By Zena Jensvold

In 2016, I moved to Madison (after I graduated from the University of Oregon with a B.S. in biology) to pursue a Ph.D. in biochemistry at the University of Wisconsin (studying viruses and the role they play in cancer and disease development). Now in my fourth year as a graduate student, I have begun to explore career paths outside academia. To explore the fields of science policy and science communication, in August 2020, the WISCIENCE coordinator at UW–Madison put me in touch with Wisconsin's Green Fire.

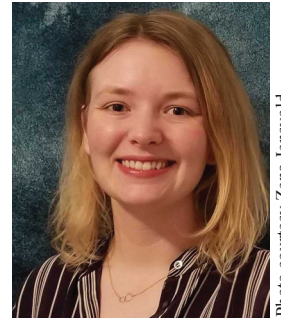


Photo courtesy Zena Jensvold

WISCIENCE (acronym for Wisconsin Institute for Science Education and Community Engagement) has helped students at many educational levels engage in science through a variety of programs, courses, events, and projects. A connection between Wisconsin's Green Fire and WISCIENCE was facilitated by Dolly Ledin, a former employee of WISCIENCE and co-chair of WGF's Environmental Education Work Group.

Specifically, UW–Madison's WISCIENCE sponsors Public Service Fellows (funded by the National Science Foundation). Graduate student fellows work with community members on public service topics. This past year, I worked as a direct service and science policy fellow with the WGF Energy Policy Work Group (Gary Radloff, Keith Reopelle, Kerry Beheler, and Don Behm) and with WGF Science Director Sarah Peterson. I had a great experience researching and drafting the *Opportunities Now 2.0* report on Energy Policy.

Diving into this research with no prior background in this field gave me the opportunity to learn more about WGF and science policy at both the state and national levels. This project has motivated me to continue in the science policy field during my remaining time as a Ph.D. student and beyond. I am now an active member of WGF's Student and Young Professionals Work Group.

If you know of a student or young professional who would benefit from receiving *Conservation Connections*, please contact syp.workgroup@gmail.com.

“Lightning Flash” Updates from WGF Work Groups

Photo credit: Ron Eckstein

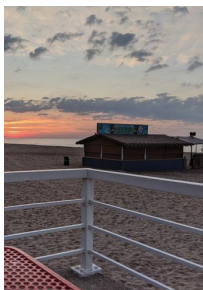


Public Lands & Forestry

We continue to work on issues concerning public lands, forest habitat, and forest biodiversity. We’ve made recommendations on land management for state parks, 15-year county forest plans, national forest management projects, and state park master plans. We continue to promote the governor’s Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program and work with the WDNR’s Division of Forestry on the Silviculture Guidance Team. See WGF’s website for an example of the kind of recommendations we make, in this case for the Iron County Forest 15-year plan: wigreenfire.org/category/forestry

—Ron Eckstein & John Robinson

Photo credit: Virginia Small



Public Trust and Wetlands

We have been involved in an issue on Bradford Beach in Milwaukee relating to the commercial development of public trust lands (reclaimed lake bed). At stake is whether a destination restaurant and bar is an appropriate use of public trust lands and what kind of concession services could be undertaken. We believe that social justice and racial equity issues need to be included in any planning.

The work group wrote a letter for WGF jointly with several other organizations to send to Wisconsin’s Attorney General and other key officials. The work group also created a statement on behalf of WGF for the public hearing held before the Lakefront Development Advisory Commission on January 27.

Several articles in *Shepherd Express* explain the concerns. <https://shepherdexpress.com/news/features/dnr-officials-concerned-about-proposed-high-end-bradford-bea/#/questions>

—Michael Cain

Photo credit: NRCS



Agriculture and Water Quality

WGF members have extensively analyzed issues related to a proposed new administrative rule to reduce movement of nitrogen from farmland to the groundwater. The proposed rule has the potential to significantly improve Wisconsin’s groundwater, but has several hurdles to cross. An economic impact test called the Reins Act, in effect since 2017, has the potential to stop the rule before it gets to the public comments stage. If it gets beyond those hurdles, it will take many years, and significant financial support to farmers and local governments, to implement. To see areas proposed for special regulations to deal with existing or potential groundwater nitrate problems: <https://wi-dnr.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index>.

—Paul La Liberte

Central Sands Water Issues

Levels of nitrate not improving

For decades, projects have attempted to tackle nitrate contamination in Central Sands, but without success. Why no progress?

<https://wiswaterguy.com/2020/02/24/why-no-progress-on-wisconsin-central-sands-nitrate/>

Photo credit: George Kraft



Rains subside, will pumping impacts return?

A possible break from record rains in the Central Sands may lower levels on full-to-the-brim lakes, but impacts from groundwater pumping will also return. <https://wiswaterguy.com/2021/02/01/did-2020-mark-a-break-from-record-rains-high-water-in-the-central-sands/>

Photo credit: George Kraft



—George Kraft

Conservation Couple Makes a Difference

By Terry Daulton

Phrases like “think globally, act locally” and “Earth Day is everyday” aptly describe Martin and Karen Voss—members of Wisconsin’s Green Fire since 2017—and their conservation work. Their story can inspire us.



Both Marty and Karen grew up on Wisconsin farms with families who encouraged interest in the natural world. Karen’s parents, Norb and Ruth Schmitz, set an example of conservation philanthropy—they donated an easement of their 200-acre homestead and a gift of \$200,000 to help the Aldo Leopold Foundation preserve a 400-acre forest called “Potter’s Woods.” Her parents were also founding members of the Baraboo Range Preservation Association.

Karen did graduate work advised by George Archibald, founder of the International Crane Foundation. She has retired from a 25-year conservation career with WDNR. Marty’s passion toward habitat restoration in their neighborhood and for the greater community, includes working with conservation organizations like Beaver Creek Reserve to advance its mission.

In the 1980s Marty and Karen bought an 80-acre farm near Eau Claire. They have creatively used Managed Forest Law, the Conservation Reserve Program, and WDNR grants, along with gathering native seeds, hand-weeding, and controlled burns to restore native oak savanna and 40 acres of prairie near their wetlands. The Wisconsin Wetlands Association created a video about their work: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHNNi6GXkaw>

The Voss’s conservation work also includes financial support for a variety of not-for-profits, including WGF. When asked what it is about WGF that inspires their support, Karen said, “My mom was a botanist, and my dad an engineer. Science and logical thinking mean a lot to us. WGF’s scientists can be trusted when they take a position on environmental issues.”

Wisconsin’s Green Fire Partners for Healthy Lakes

By Diane Daulton

Wisconsin’s established shoreland zoning standards were put in place in the 1970s to protect water quality. Since that time there has been an ebb and flow of controversy over the rights of the public to enjoy our waters and private property owners’ rights to develop and maintain their lands. Many counties reacted by developing more restrictive ordinances that further protected water quality, but a complete role reversal occurred in 2015, when Wisconsin Act 55 removed the authority of local municipalities to regulate above and beyond the state’s minimum standards.

Wisconsin’s Green Fire has received funding from the Arthur L & Elaine V. Johnson Foundation for a project to help lake associations develop data-driven voluntary lake protection projects.



To facilitate these grassroots efforts, WGF is partnering with the Oneida Lakes and Rivers Association and NOVA Ecological Services to develop tools for shoreland owners to protect lake health. The Northern Highlands Lake Assessment Toolbox model seeks to empower lake property owners and lake associations to learn about their lake’s ecology and its watershed, and act to implement voluntary shoreland best management practices, thereby safeguarding both lakes and property values. The project will facilitate the use of existing public information on lakes and their watersheds to see how they measure up and where additional opportunities may be present. According to NOVA project leader Michael Meyer, the toolbox will provide both educational tools and best management options such as those offered by Wisconsin’s Healthy Lakes initiative. Funding and technical assistance for shoreland restoration could then move forward voluntarily using a targeted approach.

Stay tuned for more information on the Northern Highlands Lake Assessment Toolbox.

Aldo Leopold continued from page 1

construction across the country. Leopold pushed to give roadless lands special protection that left them open to hunting, fishing, camping and other uses compatible with their less-developed character.

Leopold's rationale for wildland protection would later evolve to embrace a broader range of cultural, scientific and spiritual values. But he could only dimly foresee how wildlands would come to provide the basis for revitalizing communities and cultural connections, from Wisconsin prairies to Southwest deserts to German forests and beyond.

But Leopold's conservation thinking never focused exclusively on wildlands. He worked to integrate land protection with care for more populated landscapes, from farms, forests and rangelands to whole watersheds and urban neighborhoods. He acted to repair damaged ecosystems and rebuild depleted wildlife populations, providing foundations for such modern fields as ecological restoration, landscape ecology and conservation biology.

A Sand County Almanac was published in 1949, a year after Leopold's death. It is required reading in many courses on U.S. environmental thinking. I believe this is because of its lyrical prose but also because it connects the older conservation movement and contemporary environmentalism.

In the broad arc of Western conservation history, the land ethic represented a move away from viewing land as a commodity to be exploited and toward something more aligned with Indigenous views on intergenerational obligations and human kinship with other species. I believe it may contribute to further progress in realizing an ethic of responsibility and reciprocity among people, and between people and land.

Leopold, race, and conservation

Several recent articles and commentaries have characterized Leopold as a racist or white supremacist. This view reflects particular claims that pertain not only to Leopold as an individual but to the conservation movement generally.

As I see it, labeling Leopold racist oversimplifies his wilderness advocacy and his effort to understand human population pressure as a factor in environmental change. It also fails to appreciate critical shifts in Leopold's ethical outlook in the final years of his life. In his draft foreword to *A Sand County Almanac* he wrote: "I do not imply that this philosophy of land was always clear to me. It is rather the end-result of a life-journey...."



Photo credit: Anna Hawley

As Leopold was an early leader in the development of population ecology and wildlife management, it's not surprising that he considered whether these fields could offer perspective on human population growth. He knew this was sensitive territory, and explored such notions cautiously, looking at population and how it interacted with affluence, consumption, education and technological change.

In encouraging citizens to be more mindful about their consumer choices, he redefined conservation as "our attempt to put human ecology on a permanent footing."

The land ethic and social evolution

Although Leopold never advocated harsh or coercive population control measures or steps that could be viewed as racially motivated, he was not as visionary on social justice matters as he was on conservation issues. In his extensive writings you can find occasional statements and phrasings that now read as awkward, inept and naive. In an essay on pine trees, for example, he employed an archaic stock phrase, flippantly remarking that white pines "adhere closely to the Anglo-Saxon doctrine of free, white, and twenty-one."

However, Leopold was also a lifelong reformer who understood the fundamental connections between social and ecological well-being. Based on that understanding, he worked to advance an ethic of care that united humans' need for justice and compassion toward one another and toward the living land.

The land ethic as Leopold framed it was not elitist or exclusionary. It explicitly embraced people as members of the "land community," without placing conditions on that membership. Its tenets inherently subvert racist and white supremacist attitudes.

Leopold composed "The Land Ethic" in the summer of 1947 as the clouds of World War II were still dissipating. Global conflagration and the deployment of destructive new technologies tempered his characteristic progressive outlook. He wrote—albeit in the gendered language of the time—that "It has required nineteen centuries to define decent man-to-man conduct and the process is only half done; it may take as long to evolve a code of decency for man-to-land conduct."

Leopold saw that an ethic had to be a collective cultural effort, ever emerging "in the minds of a thinking community." Today, as people around the world struggle to address complex and interconnected social and environmental crises, our shared future depends on forging an ethic that integrates diverse voices, belief systems and ways of knowing.

P.O. Box 1206, Rhineland, WI 54501

Not a member?
Please join
Wisconsin's Green Fire

Please visit:

<https://wigreenfire.org/make-a-difference/>

to join or renew on-line or to download
a membership form.

Thank you for supporting
the conservation legacy of
Wisconsin.

WGF Employment Opportunity

Wisconsin's Green Fire is seeking applications for a part-time paid position as **Membership and Development Coordinator**. The position will be part of our staff team, helping us fulfill our WGF goals to inform sound public policy and achieve positive conservation outcomes.

Applications will be accepted until April 23, 2021.

Find additional information at: <https://wigreenfire.org/employment/>.

Help Wanted: Volunteers

WGF is seeking special volunteers for:

- **WGF Membership Committee.** We need a motivated go-getter to join our membership committee. If you have great ideas, experience with other not-for-profit membership approaches, and/or a fun-loving personality, you are encouraged to contact us at info@wigreenfire.org. Put "Membership Committee" in the subject line. Only three to four meetings per year and job satisfaction guaranteed!
- **WGF Event Planning.** We have a temporary volunteer role to help WGF plan its annual meeting (fall 2021) and help plan other events in summer and



Photo credit: Lucy Tyrrell

fall. Qualifications? Must be able to connect online for virtual meetings, come up with inspirational ideas, and tell at least one good joke! Email info@wigreenfire.org to express your interest. Please put "Event Planning" in the subject line.

WGF Plans Ahead for Summer and Fall Events

As we follow COVID safety recommendations, Wisconsin's Green Fire hopes to offer—for the summer and fall—a few in-person field trips and some socially-distanced outdoor fundraisers. At present, we are working to set up a **wolf howling field trip** and hope to include both northern and southern Wisconsin **options for additional field trips**.

We are also beginning to plan for a **fall annual meeting, which would be a combination of virtual and in-person** components. This year we would like to offer a half-day virtual session similar to previous annual meetings, complemented by regional in-person opportunities for networking and learning.

We will share details for these events, as we know them, via mailed and online communications. Stay tuned over the next weeks and months.