

THE LEOPOLD WRITING PROGRAM

2017 ALDO LEOPOLD WRITING CONTEST AWARD WINNER



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GRADES 8-9 DIVISION
BEST OVERALL ESSAY

Private Profit vs. Public Interest

Beginning in 2010, and once again this year, Representative Jason Chaffetz of Utah introduced a bill to sell off public lands. This bill would privatize lands that have been public for decades, giving the owners free rein to do whatever they wanted, including deforestation and mining activities that pollute rivers. If this bill had passed, people would not be able to hike, bike, or do anything else, because someone or some corporation would own that land; fortunately, it never received a hearing. "These places belong to all Americans and deserve a force of public servants to help monitor and protect them for future generations," said Matt Keller, senior director of conservation with The Wilderness Society. The relationship between people and the land has oftentimes been one of destruction; clear cutting forests, the destruction of wildlife habitat, and mining and other private interests. This is not showing respect for our planet, and certainly not giving it the care it needs. The ways we treat each other could connect to how we treat the land. If we would all respect each other, it might result in our respecting the land. Aldo Leopold, a great American ecologist, believed that "the human relationship to the land must rest, not on mere economic expediency, but on ethics, aesthetics, and a mutually beneficial state of ecological resilience and integrity," (Qi). Had Leopold and Chaffetz met, there is no doubt that they would have had a strong disagreement. In trying to pass a bill to sell public and protected lands, Chaffetz showed that he has no understanding or sympathy for the ideals that Leopold held dear. Chaffetz's behavior is certainly based on "economic expediency", economic advantage, because selling these lands would mean land use only for profit. On February 1, Chaffetz withdrew the bill because of protests and general opposition. These protests were held in many states including New Mexico. I doubt that many of these protesters know who Aldo Leopold was, but they are certainly following his ideas. "When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect" (The Aldo Leopold Foundation).

Works Cited

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