

THE LEOPOLD WRITING PROGRAM

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Land Ethics

“We shall never achieve harmony with the land, any more than we shall achieve absolute justice or liberty for people. In these higher aspirations, the important thing is not to achieve but to strive.” – Aldo Leopold

Land ethics should create a balance between ecology and economy so that both can thrive.

The balance between the economy and ecology is vital. Many countries rely on their ecosystems to support their economy. For example, Costa Rica is largely dependent upon tourism and ecotourism. If profits are prioritized over nature, there will be a large imbalance between the two. If a thousand acres of trees are cleared for space to farm cattle or grow soy, that thousand acres of trees will no longer be absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and turning it into oxygen. Costa Rica has shifted its national policy. As many people visit the coastal nation every year to experience outdoor adventures in the jungle, this was a good financial decision. The Costa Rican government legislated that preserving the ecology of their country would be beneficial to their economy, and time has shown they were correct.

An important part of land ethics is the conservation of ecosystems. One of the obstacles to conserving the ecosystem is the lack of profit. The reason that areas of the rainforest are cleared is to make room for cattle, which profits ranchers. This practice is not sustainable, as it is harming animals and the environment without being able to renew what is destroyed. There is nothing to be gained economy-wise by preserving the ecosystem. But if there was a way to profit off of leaving the environment intact, people could still earn a living and nature would remain stable. For example, many of the plants contained within the forests and mangroves of Costa Rica are supporting pharmaceutical research, meaning that the conservation of these areas is both profitable and environmentally sustainable. The preservation of biodiversity in places like Costa Rica can provide an opportunity for medicinal research in the future, preserving even the knowledge of the native people, which could further support medical research. Also, preserving many of the native animal species that have not been thoroughly researched could help preserve ours.

As Aldo Leopold said, we will never be able to reach perfect harmony with nature. However, we can continue to strive towards the ideal of balancing our economic needs with that of the natural environment. If we can combine the ideals of economy and ecology by highlighting the financial benefits of supporting nature, we can bring together opposing goals to create balance.



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