

# THE LEOPOLD WRITING PROGRAM

2020 ALDO LEOPOLD WRITING CONTEST AWARD WINNER

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HONORABLE MENTION, GRADES 6-7

## Conserving Enchantment

Aldo Leopold said, “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.” Aldo Leopold, conservationist, and author of *A Sand County Almanac* wrote about the “land ethic,” the connection between people and their natural environment. Leopold devoted much of his life to educating people about the environment, to inspire them to respect it and live in harmony with it. He believed “health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal and conservation is the effort to understand and preserve this capacity.”

The root of today’s problem is that economy and ecology are out of sync, which was not Leopold’s hope. I grew up in New Mexico’s boundless wilderness: playing in the Gila, hiking Santa Fe, Carson, and Jemez, and stumbling upon wild boar and herds of deer. I watched the wildflowers bloom in Pecos and rock climbed on Grasshopper trail. I tubed in the Rio Grande, Chama, Cimarron, De la Media and De Las Vacas rivers and camped in every mentioned place. I explored Cibola and Valle Vidal, and witnessed the cranes fly into Socorro. Without Leopold’s vision of a sustainable wilderness, I could not have had these amazing experiences. Leopold lived without ruining his environment. New Mexico, wilderness is our home.

Our economy relies on things that won’t last, or are destructive to the environment, and that needs to change. As population and development increase in New Mexico, so does the need for preserving ecology. Losing this becomes a problem for all existence. Tourism has always been a big part of our economy. We have great cultural diversity: people visit our festivals, ski hills, churches and Pueblos. Travelers flock to our wilderness, placing wear and tear on it, but rarely does tourism money get reinvested in it.

One way to sustain the New Mexico economy, having it informed by ecology, is through ecotourism. Ecotourism is a way for people to experience the wonders of ecology without destroying it. This summer, I took a river rafting trip down the Taos Box. It was exhilarating. I saw bald eagles and imported bighorn sheep flourishing with babies. My guide, a Marine and off-season farmer, was amazing. He taught me the river and how to respect its white-capped wonders. I renewed my respect for people who appreciate their surroundings, know them, teach others about them, and honor them. Could we do this on the rivers and lands with guided tours and dedicate some proceeds solely to the environment?

Politicians and economic leaders focus on money, but do not realize how their actions negatively impact our ecosystems. New Mexico’s rivers suffer because companies do not prioritize conserving them. Sometimes, people get obsessed with progress and neglect what surrounds them and the consequences they create, or lack to create. Leopold believed that “conservation was a state of harmony between men and land” and that “we abuse land because we see it as a commodity belonging to us. Seeing our land as a community, we may begin to use it with love and respect.” Getting politicians and leaders out into the wilderness with us may help achieve this. Then, leaders would experience why we love our home, and why we want to conserve all that it is.



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