

Inspiring an ethic of caring for our planet by cultivating diverse voices through the spoken and written word.

Growth Through Community

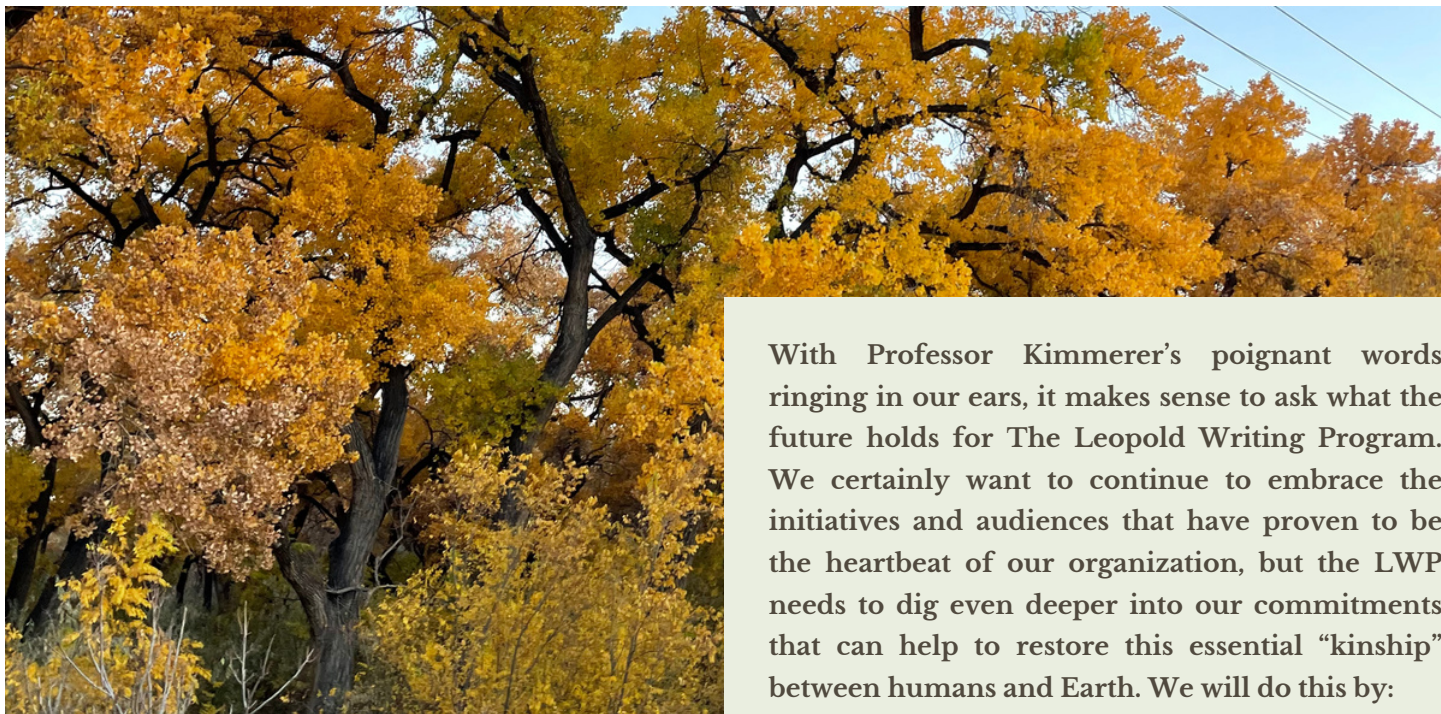
BY JOHN BYRAM, Board President

“When we feel ourselves part of a community that we engage with love and respect, we live in a very different world.... [A]s we heal the land, we are also healing ourselves.”

— ROBIN WALL KIMMERER

2023 has been an exciting and busy year for the Leopold Writing Program! Finally able to fully emerge from the challenges imposed by the global COVID-19 pandemic, we enthusiastically renewed our connections to stakeholders through a complete calendar of our signature events—the Aldo Leopold Writing Contest, the Aldo and Estella Leopold Residency, and the Annual Leopold Lecture. It was exhilarating to once again be able to connect with so many of our constituents in person and celebrate the lasting impact of environmental communicators of all ages. We also began a stimulating new partnership with Albuquerque’s excellent independent bookstore, Bookworks, focused on a speaker series called *Writing the Wild*. These events celebrate environmental authors—local, regional, and national—through public readings and conversations about the writers’ latest projects. The inaugural book events have been well received and we look forward to expanding the *Writing the Wild* offerings in the coming year. Now that I have mentioned one of our newest endeavors, let me step back to briefly review each of our established programs.

The Aldo Leopold Writing Contest has continued to grow with participation from a diverse list of New Mexico middle and high schools across the state. This year, 187 students entered the contest by submitting an essay exploring the current relationship between humans and the land. Our Aldo and Estella Leopold Residency has also been going strong and, after just having celebrated its tenth anniversary, continues to provide a unique opportunity for writers to come to New Mexico and spend time in the Leopold family’s original Tres Piedras *Mi Casita* cabin. This newsletter features articles that take deeper dives into the Writing Contest’s and Residency’s recent activities and speak to these programs’ continued vibrancy.



This year's return of the Annual Leopold Lecture featured one of the LWP's most memorable gatherings in the organization's already rich history. The program was privileged to welcome award-winning Potawatomi environmental author Robin Wall Kimmerer (an academic botanist known internationally for her memoir *Braiding Sweetgrass* and tireless advocacy on behalf of Native peoples and cultures) to give this year's Lecture. The standing-room-only event at Albuquerque's Indian Pueblo Cultural Center combined an award ceremony for—and readings by—the student winners of this year's Writing Contest and Professor Kimmerer's inspiring presentation focused on how all of us can take an active role in helping to restore our connections to nature. She shared an impassioned “story of kinship” between humans and the natural world as part of renewing a culture of restoration that encourages us to see all living things as interdependent. She finished her formal remarks with this call to action:

“When we feel ourselves part of a community that we engage with love and respect, we live in a very different world.... [A]s we heal the land, we are also healing ourselves.”

With Professor Kimmerer's poignant words ringing in our ears, it makes sense to ask what the future holds for The Leopold Writing Program. We certainly want to continue to embrace the initiatives and audiences that have proven to be the heartbeat of our organization, but the LWP needs to dig even deeper into our commitments that can help to restore this essential “kinship” between humans and Earth. We will do this by:

- Expanding our organizational commitment to including new voices and perspectives in our programmatic work.
- Increasing our communications outreach efforts to rural and underserved populations throughout our state and region.
- Seeking fresh opportunities to partner with like-minded organizations to further common goals that move us all closer to recognizing the interdependency of humans and the land.

All of our organization's success—and the ambitious future plans, detailed above—has come with some growing pains that have made clear the LWP could benefit greatly from additional administrative leadership support. To address that need, the Board of Directors made a commitment earlier this year to greenlight the creation of a full-time staff position, and I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the Program's first program director, Nina A. Simon, who joined the organization this fall. Nina's strong background in nonprofit administration and interest in the environmental advocacy mission of the LWP makes her a perfect fit to help our programs reach even larger audiences and levels of stakeholder engagement. We look forward to working with her on all of our various initiatives.

I hope you share our confidence that the Leopold Writing Program is well positioned to build upon our past successes and pursue important future opportunities. As we move down these paths, I look forward to seeing many of you at LWP events in the coming year and continuing—with your support as participants, partners, and donors—

the important mission of the organization, “to inspire an ethic of caring for our planet by cultivating diverse voices through the spoken and written word.”

Onward and upward in 2024!



New Leadership at The Leopold Writing Program



Nina in The Gila Wilderness

We Are Excited to Introduce Our New Program Director: Nina A. Simon

Growing up in the wooded terrain of the East Coast, the open land of the desert Southwest has always captivated me. Early in my youth my family began making annual treks out West to visit my aunt and cousins in Albuquerque. My extended family taught me about Children of the Earth, large wingless insects resembling wide-eyed human babies that one could find crawling along the sandy walkways by their homes, and described moon shadows so bright they would shake you out of sleep in the middle of the night. They cautioned me away from Datura, the toxic night-blooming flower I saw along the

sidewalks, and taught me to listen for the shik-shik of a rattlesnake tail, instilling within me a healthy dose of respect for this unfamiliar world. They showed me the petroglyphs near their home, ancient images carved into rocks by the peoples who lived on this land a long time ago, and where I was certain I could make out images of human figures alongside animals.

Since moving here ten years ago, I have come to know that those alluring stories of the natural world are real and abundant if you know how to look for them. I live by the river now and I'm awakened in the late fall mornings by the sounds of sandhill cranes, large migrating birds with a call like that of a prehistoric creature, that make their way down from the marshlands and prairies of northern North America. I regularly run into quiet coyotes beneath the cottonwoods, and I know where to find large patches of medicinal Yerba Mansa that reblooms in the bosque every spring, despite the human paths widening into its domain each year.

Also in those ten years, I have had the privilege to work for a variety of nonprofit organizations with missions that align with my own. I began my nonprofit career in maternal health equity, working first as a community birth doula and then shifting to administrative roles for a variety of maternal health and direct service organizations. In that time, I have leaned into developing skills in event planning, fundraising, and communications. Through these professional experiences I have come to know that community is more than just the backbone to organizational work, it is a principle to live by. This ethic is true, too, in our relationship with the natural world.

Most of my days are punctuated by walks in the foothills or the bosque, depending on the season.

I schedule my life around ensuring I can take a step outside a few times each day and walk among plants and animals. For those of us who are drawn to be in nature, there is an understanding that there is something priceless about the community one finds in the wild. When I learned of Aldo Leopold's work and writing, I felt I'd found a friend. He put to words a concept many of us know to be accurate:

"All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants and animals, or collectively the land."

I began working for the Leopold Writing Program this fall, 2023, and I feel honored for the opportunity to marry my experience in nonprofit management with the understanding that we are in community with the natural world. As the organization grows I look forward to exploring new ways to expand Leopold's ideas and broaden the reach of the Leopold Writing Program. This newsletter is an important way for me and the LWP board to honor Leopold's legacy: to use the written word to inspire care for planet Earth. I look forward to developing and deepening the Leopold Writing Program's relationship with you, our community, and our backbone of supporters.

- Nina A. Simon, Program Director





Aldo and Estella Leopold Residency 10 Years Later and Still Going Strong

BY JEFF PAPPAS, Board Member & Aldo and Estella Leopold Residency Coordinator

“Every subsequent day during my Residency, nothing in my work agenda felt more urgent than catching the sunset.”

Dr. Eve Bratman—2021 Aldo and Estella Leopold Resident

For ten years, since Courtney White became the first Aldo and Estella Leopold Resident in 2012, the Leopold Writing Program and the US Forest Service has been busy hosting 23 scholars with the singular purpose: to reflect on the profound work of Aldo Leopold. The residency was initially conceived to bring much needed attention to Leopold’s early Forest Service career in the Gila and Carson national forests. Arguably, it was those early years before his more celebrated time at the University of Wisconsin where Leopold coalesced his mature thinking about wilderness that led to his renowned book *A Sand County Almanac*. Fortunately for the Leopold Writing Program we had a true champion in the US Forest Service, who enthusiastically offered up the historic Leopold cabin, Mi Casita, in Tres Piedras, New Mexico, to host this traditional residency.

Although the residency has never adopted an official motto, if asked, Leopold himself might have picked something like this. It is from his journal, *Round River*. “We shall never achieve harmony with the land,” wrote Leopold, “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.” In these increasingly turbulent and unstable times, the essence of Leopold’s

work has inspired a new generation of environmental thinkers to work that much harder. In so many ways, Leopold’s quest to reimagine how to live peacefully and sustainably echoes the existential climate crisis we now face. But unlike similar writers before or since, so many of our young scholars today are harkening back to Leopold, specifically his profound “Land Ethic” for guidance and inspiration.

Since 2012, the Aldo and Estella Leopold Residency has offered a quiet space for writers and artists to think about the future while reflecting on the past. To mark the program’s first decade, in the summer of 2022, the LWP Board of Directors invited the residents back to Mi Casita for a fun-filled weekend and to strengthen the core values of the residency. Event highlights included field trips and a wonderful dinner at Mi Casita. Tables were set up outside on the porch facing the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. There was much joy exchanged and stories shared. It was evident that so many strong memories still linger.

One of the more delightful and productive activities was an afternoon gathering of the residents to talk about what the next ten years might look like. Shortly before the reunion, the LWP spent the better part of 2021 rewriting its

mission statement to reflect on a widespread concern about the environmental movement and its perceived - if not accurate - reputation as a white, middle-class enterprise.

Former Aldo & Estella Leopold Residents and Leopold Writing Program Board of Directors sit on the front steps of Mi Casita.



Photo by Kitty Leaken

“The hope of the future lies not in curbing the influence of human occupancy—it is already too late for that—but in creating a better understanding of the extent of that influence and a new ethic for its governance.”

- Aldo Leopold

The consistent lack of diversity, one might argue, genuinely prohibits a more robust and dynamic conservation mindset, a key to tackling issues like climate justice and equity. The group dug in and contemplated how the residency could support efforts aimed to attract people in sympathy with the new mission, which is to “inspire an ethic of caring for our planet by cultivating diverse voices through the spoken and written word.”

With a group such as this, naturally, the sparks flew, and the conversation leaned to the future. Yet, the true binding force that weekend was Leopold himself. His words and deeds almost a century ago still ring loudly today. In book after book and article after article, Leopold’s pragmatism is a stinging reminder that the truth is seldom complicated. His fundamental simplicity and unvarnished prose resonate just as powerfully today as it did in 1949, the year *A Sand County*

Almanac reminded us that the course of empire comes with considerable cost. “The hope of the future,” argued Leopold in his classic 1933 book *Game Management*, “lies not in curbing the influence of human occupancy—it is already too late for that—but in creating a better understanding of the extent of that influence and a new ethic for its governance.”

Successfully bridging the generations is a rare thing and only a select few writers have done it as well as Leopold. It’s remarkable to me that in 1933 he had already anticipated what we now call the Anthropocene, where humans are the dominant influence on the climate and the environment. Of course, it is our hope that the residency will continue to offer an inspirational space to think about the next challenge just as it did for Eve Bratman and so many others who have experienced the power of Mi Casita firsthand.



Photo by Kitty Leiken



ALDO LEOPOLD WRITING CONTEST

Each year, the Aldo Leopold Writing Contest invites New Mexico students in Grades 6-12 to submit essays in response to a carefully-crafted and thought-provoking prompt inspired by the writings of Aldo Leopold. Encouraged by their teachers, students delve into his philosophies of land stewardship, especially as set forth in *A Sand County Almanac*, and explore the relevance of Leopold's classic and timeless observations to issues that they experience personally, locally, and globally.

2022 & 2023 CONTEST UPDATES

BY SAYRE GERHART,
Vice President & Aldo Leopold Writing Contest Coordinator

I am excited to report on the 2022 and 2023 Leopold Writing Contests. The Leopold Writing Contest is a powerful opportunity for students to give voice to their connections to - or concerns about - the environment and to showcase their work and ideas. I first learned about the Leopold Writing Program when my children participated in the Writing Contest many years ago, perhaps during that first contest in 2009. When reading my daughters' essays I remember my

surprise at the depth of passion they felt towards the Rio Grande bosque and the sophistication of their awareness of the lives of the wildlife within. The Writing Contest is also a valuable tool for intergenerational communication about Leopold's Land Ethic and our shared hope and insights for the future of our community and the planet.

The Leopold Writing Program held the Thirteenth Annual Writing Contest in 2022. After two years of the pandemic disruptions causing lower number of entries, we were encouraged by the enthusiastic response and the number of submissions. We received 192 essays from 42 schools located around the state. The writing prompt included a quote from *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold's posthumous classic detailing his philosophy for land conservation, and asked:

2022 ESSAY PROMPT

"What actions have you taken to help "tend the land" (such as protecting soil, plants, animals, wildlife habitat, water sources, etc.), or what are your ideas for how you and other young people can help counteract the impacts of climate disruption on the different elements of your local environment?"



2022 Aldo Leopold Writing Contest winners with their certificates.

The diversity of experiences and activities described in the student essays were hopeful and impressive. Many students wrote about their everyday actions that create significant impacts when amplified by shared actions in the community. Others wrote about their relationship to a particular place and their role in protecting and participating in that ecosystem. Most essays included stories about the relationship between the land and the community and one's family. Recognizing the quality of essays, the judges voted to award books to the students and to increase the cash award for the "honorable mentions."

The 2022 Writing Contest awards were presented at a special ceremony on May 1st at the historic Senate Chambers in the Bataan Memorial Building in Santa Fe. The Leopold Writing Program thanks the State of New Mexico and board member Jeff Pappas for the use of the beautiful old Senate Chamber; it provided the perfect gravitas and significance to the event. The special ceremony offered a joyful focus on the students and their families, and we were treated to a reading by each student of their winning essay. It was powerful to hear their own words read by each student author and to see a community build as students connect with each other. One impact of this event may be found in the comment by a student, who remarked, "I didn't know that I could get paid to write before this!"

2023 ESSAY PROMPT

"After reflecting on Kimmerer's and Leopold's thoughts about our relationship to the land, what do you see as your role in returning the Earth's gifts?"

The Fourteenth Annual Leopold Writing Contest was held in 2023. We received 187 essays from more than 37 schools from around the state. The prompt included a quote from both Aldo Leopold and from Robin Wall Kimmerer, who was in Albuquerque on Earth Day 2023 to give the Annual Leopold Lecture.

Students wrote passionately about climate change and how to create a sustainable future. They wrote about wildlife; about how they learn from bison, deer, and bees. And they wrote about gratitude for the Earth and making choices to heal and take care of the environment. Student winners from each grade level read their essays to a sold-out public audience of about 275 attendees. Robin Wall Kimmerer celebrated the student winners by handing out awards and books before the Annual Lecture event. The Leopold Writing Program intentionally nurtures relationships between accomplished writers, educators, students, and the larger communities in which we live, to further our mission to engage in the urgent conversation to address changing realities brought about by climate disruption, biodiversity loss, growing demand for fresh water, and other global conservation issues. What makes these changing realities bearable is gratitude, the awareness of abundance in the world, and that we care for each other.

The Leopold Writing Program thanks Glenda Muirhead for her help with every contest through the years, as well as the help from Rachel Landman in 2022 and board member Elena Kayak in 2023. We thank the team of volunteers each year who read all the essays and participated in the judging process.

Finally, we express a deep gratitude to all students who participated in the Writing Contest and to the winning essayists. All winning essays can be found on our website at www.leopoldwritingprogram.com.

It is our hope that by asking questions and prompting consideration of the outdoors and wildlife, the students are invited into dialogue and will know their thoughts are valued. We must teach critical thinking and nurture their voices. As stated by Aldo Leopold,

“What the youth needs to be told is that a ship is a-building in his/her own mental dry dock, a ship with freedom of the seas.”

(A Sand County Almanac, pg.187)



Robin Wall Kimmerer handing 2023 winner Alessandra Seawright her award.



2022 WINNERS



ALEX HANNA
BEST ESSAY Grades 6-7
Hanna Homeschool, Albuquerque



TIMOTHY RYER
BEST ESSAY Grades 8-9
Mandela International Magnet School, Santa Fe



ELIOT PATTON
BEST ESSAY Grades 10-12
Bosque School, Albuquerque

2022 HONORABLE MENTION RECIPIENTS

ADITYA VISWANATHAN, *Grade 7*
Los Alamos Middle School, Los Alamos

STELLA GIORGETTI, *Grade 7*
La Mariposa Montessori, Santa Fe

MIA SCHLEMAN, *Grade 8*
Mandela International Magnet School, Santa Fe

KALILA KO, *Grade 9*
Taos High School, Tres Piedras

ISABELLA McTEIGUE, *Grade 11*
Los Alamos High School, Los Alamos

MATTHEW OSCHWALD, *Grade 12*
Estancia Valley Classical Academy, Albuquerque

2023 WINNERS



ALESSANDRA SEAWRIGHT
BEST ESSAY Grades 6-7
La Mariposa Montessori School, Santa Fe



FRANCES ANDERSON
BEST ESSAY Grades 8-9
Santa Fe Girls' School, Santa Fe



BODHI LEWIS
BEST ESSAY Grades 10-12
Mandela International Magnet School, Santa Fe

2023 HONORABLE MENTION RECIPIENTS

ALIANA HARDY, *Grade 7*
Native American Community Academy, ABQ

EVELYN LEMON, *Grade 6*
La Mariposa Montessori School, Santa Fe

MAIYA BROCK, *Grade 9*
New Mexico School for the Arts, Santa Fe

MARY HELEN BROWN, *Grade 9*
Rehoboth Christian High School, Rehoboth

SOFIA ALEXANDRESCU, *Grade 11*
Santa Fe Preparatory School, Santa Fe

MADELINE HOSTETLER, *Grade 11*
Rio Rancho High School, Rio Rancho

2024 Events Calendar



FEBRUARY 15

Writing Contest essay submittal deadline

FEBRUARY 16

Residency application deadline

MARCH

Writing Contest winners announcement

MARCH 22

Residency selection announcement

SPRING

Writing Contest Awards Ceremony

MAY - OCTOBER

Residency season

FALL

Annual Leopold Lecture

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Nusenda Credit Union

Taos Ski Valley Charitable Fund at
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UNM Department of Economics

USDA Forest Service

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Your Financial Support Matters

The Leopold Writing Program cultivates environmental leaders and promotes the land ethic through its writing programs, educational initiatives, and public lectures. To continue to accomplish our goals, we need your support.

Please mail your contribution or donate online at leopoldwritingprogram.org

Gift options include cash, bequests or memorial gifts, stocks, bonds, real property, and annuities. To discuss giving opportunities, contact Anthony Anella at 505-265-8713

Yes, I want to support the Leopold Writing Program!

Enclosed is my gift of ☐ \$20 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$500 Other _____

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Make checks payable to Leopold Writing Program.

Mail to: Leopold Writing Program, PO Box 40122, Albuquerque, NM 87196

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Gifts to LWP are tax deductible as charitable contributions.