

I was raised off-grid in Tres Piedras, New Mexico, the same place where Aldo Leopold began his conservation efforts. Growing up in an off-grid lifestyle has helped me become aware of environmental issues and solutions around me. There are many things my family and I have done to help tend the land and counteract the impacts of climate disruption in our local ecosystem.

Water is a major struggle in New Mexico and because of the over-consumption of groundwater, the land is becoming more arid. I have found that there are better ways to collect water without depleting ground water. Utilizing the water that falls from the sky, we catch rainwater and snowmelt. Once it is caught and filtered, it can then be used for drinking water, personal hygiene and garden plants. Catching our own water makes us mindful of how much water we use and actually need, as we physically carry our water to our house from the water cistern. Recycling waste water is also a very effective way of minimizing water use. At home after someone is done washing dishes the water is reused for the flowers. If more people start catching water, the groundwater will be replenished.

Protecting the soil is very important and some things I have done to help keep the soil near my house healthy are work on gardening, composting, and letting some of the natural plants that were already there grow. Tending the soil is the first step to a healthy garden. One way to enrich the soil is by adding compost made of horse manure and native grasses. The garden is where we put our compost, helping improve the soil for the plants. Rock pits are used to help water infiltration. A variety of garden walls and terraces are used to reduce erosion. There is also a small pond at my house which catches sediment, improving the ground around it as it fills up. Plants like yarrow and quelite, which were in the ground to begin with, are very healthy and useful. Letting amaranth grow instead of weeding it helps improve the soil and provides food for birds during the winter. These plants also provide foliage for our bees.

Energy is central to most people's lifestyles, but it has become problematic. Finding cleaner energy systems is vital to save and conserve our future and land. Living off-grid has been the most effective and powerful thing my family has done to contribute to a positive change for our future. Using a small solar system for our lights and electrical needs and having a passive solar house design enables us to make the most of the sunlight that is so abundant in New Mexico. This heat of the sun is collected during the day time, and released throughout the night. In addition to using solar power, we also make fires which create charcoal. Going back to improving soil, this charcoal is used in the garden. When we build, we recycle glass, tin, plastic bottles and cans and use them in our architectural structures. This keeps useful materials out of the landfill.

I'm very happy and proud to continue the legacy of Aldo Leopold's conservation work to preserve the land. The efforts my family has made of living close to the land, conserving water, recycling, gardening, using solar power, and living self-sufficiently, have directly contributed to the prevention of environmental degradation. These actions are helping us move towards a better future for New Mexico and I want to encourage other New Mexicans to do the same.