

THE LEOPOLD WRITING PROGRAM

2021 ALDO LEOPOLD WRITING CONTEST AWARD WINNER



CHARLES CHAPMAN

HONORABLE MENTION Grades 8-9

Valuable “Property”

When you think of New Mexico, what comes to mind? Is it the culture, or the history? For me, it is the landscape. The vast dry high desert plains, spotted with chamisa and juniper. During quarantine, this image of waterless terrain has been etched in my brain. I long for the water of a lake surrounded by green trees and grass. I hope for the ocean, waves crashing against the soft sand of a warm beach. I wish to leave this parched land, and be replenished by the water and humidity.

This feat of finding clean water surrounded by green forest and humid air has proved to be near impossible in New Mexico, where even the lakes are surrounded by withered soil and sharp rocks. Over the summer, my family would go to many of northern New Mexico’s lakes, only to find them near empty, and infested with toxic algae. I couldn’t help but think, *it didn’t need to be this way*. With the large commercial potato crops in Colorado, and the water rights agreement New Mexico

has with Texas, it is up to us to conserve the little water we have. Water is as Aldo Leopold wrote about land in his essay *Land Ethics*, “Land, like Odysseus’ slave-girls, is still property. The land relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations”.

When I first learned that different lakes in New Mexico were owned by different cities and states, I was confused. I couldn’t imagine how water in New Mexico could belong to Texas. It didn’t make sense. As young as I was when I first learned this, this feeling still resonates with me. As little water as New Mexico has, a lot of it doesn’t even belong to us.

This leads us to the question, “What is the most important of New Mexico’s resources that we need to preserve?” Living in New Mexico you hear this answer over and over, *we need to conserve our water*. Despite being told this throughout my life, I have never taken it to heart as everyone should. During quarantine, while not being able to leave, water conservation has become more important to me than ever before. We all need to do our part, and be conscious of our water usage. Now whenever I run the faucet, I think of that water going back into one of our drained reservoirs or near-empty aquifers. Imagine if everyone halved their water usage. We would be able to keep our reservoirs better managed, and in the case of a severe drought, we would be able to pull from that larger backup supply to help us survive. We need to do everything in our power to keep this land alive.

The difference between a visionary and an activist is that activists follow through. Having one idea doesn’t mean anything, greatness comes when action is taken. In today’s society, the concept of activism has been overlooked by many. It has become popular to post your idea on social media, but forget to, or possibly never intend to act on it. As Aldo Leopold said “The modern dogma is comfort at any cost”. Aldo Leopold is remembered because he acted, both by writing and pursuing his many great ideas, such as forest conservation, and living in harmony with the nature around us. He never shied away from a challenge, and neither can we. Our dry deserts will only become more arid if no one acts. It takes everyday people to make a difference, and I am fully confident that we can.