

The naturalist and conservationist, Aldo Leopold, described the dynamic interconnection between soils, plants, and animals. I experience these connections every day as my family and I act as stewards to the magnificent vibrant land surrounding our home. Every day I see a panoramic view of the mountains painted by spectacular sunrises and sunsets. Every day I hear cicadas chirping and crows squawking as they perch in the short scrubby pinon trees.

Every night I fall asleep to the sound of coyotes yodeling at the moon. In the mornings, I look forward to going on a hike with my two dogs, Cricket and Beau. Pack rats collect dead jumping cholla branches and horse manure to make their teepee shaped nests. They burrow deep into the earth and their middens provide shelter for other small creatures. The pack rats help spread seeds for the plants and they are also food for the coyotes. This is a perfect example of interconnectedness between soil, plants, and animals. My family and I treasure these things.

We live on 2.5 acres of land that used to be part of a cattle ranch. When we found this land, the soil was eroding and the land felt completely desolate. We decided to build our home here. Our house is a green home and it is run off of solar energy. We use solar panels to generate the electricity needed to power our house and therefore, we are not using fossil fuels which pollute the earth.

Our family made many choices to protect and conserve our land when we built our home. About 80% of the water we use goes into a greywater system to water our plants and trees. We also catch rainwater from the roof to use for irrigation and toilet flushing. This saves water and recycles it back into the soil helping the plants and animals survive and thrive. We have planted many native grasses and wild flowers to stop the erosion, providing habitats for insects and birds while also providing food for herbivores such as pack rats and jack rabbits.

In our plan, we also included ways to produce our own food. We planted many cultivated plants and fruit trees which provides food for our family and for the local wildlife. These plants benefit from the greywater and rainwater we collect. Our beehive provides pollinators for the plants and honey for us. Our chickens produce manure for fertilizing the soil and produce eggs for our food.

All of these choices and practices serve to feed and support the fountain of energy that Aldo Leopold describes. "Land, then, is not merely soil; it is a fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals ... When a change occurs in one part of the circuit, many other parts must adjust themselves to it." I feel so proud to be part of a family that honors this circuit and tends to the land.

*(490 words)*