

2025 IMPACT REPORT

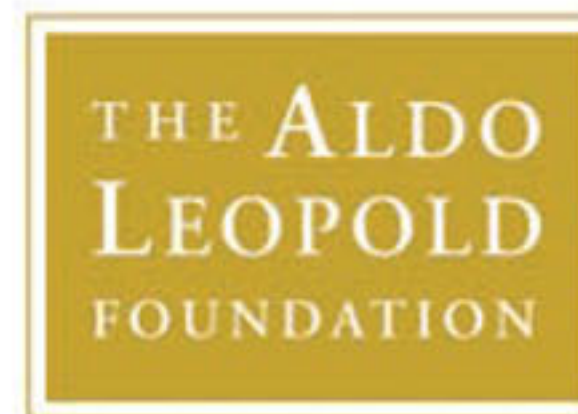
Thanks to your support over the last year we have brought forward so many stories that show the Land Ethic in action across the country!

Compelling voices on *Land Ethic Live!* highlight topics ranging from carbon as the connective tissue of all life to practices like journaling that help us slow down to the speed of nature.

Upcoming stories in Outlook eNewsletter and on *A Sand County Blog* will examine the convergence and divergence of the land ethic with new tools such as bioengineering and artificial intelligence.

—Buddy Huffaker, President and Executive Director

Read more from Buddy inside!



E13701 Levee Road
Baraboo, WI 53913

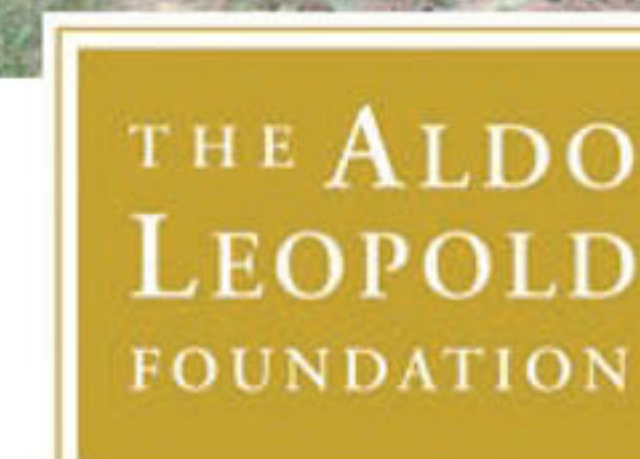


Thank you for loving wildly!



Did you know?

Beginning in 2026, a new federal tax law allows donors to deduct charitable contributions even if they don't itemize. If you take the standard deduction on your tax return, you may be able to deduct up to \$1,000 (individual) or \$2,000 (married couples filing jointly) from your taxable income. The deduction applies only to cash gifts (gifts made by cash, check, credit card, or EFT). Donations of stock, property, or other non-cash assets do not qualify. Tax benefits are subject to IRS rules and limitations. Individual circumstances may vary. Please consult a qualified tax advisor or the IRS for guidance regarding your specific situation.



2025
IMPACT REPORT



From the Hearts of the Foundation's Leadership

The Times—and the Tools—They are a-Changing; Community is the Key to a Healthy Future

"By and large, our present problem is one of attitudes and implements. We are remodeling the Alhambra with a steam-shovel, and we are proud of our yardage. We shall hardly relinquish the shovel, which after all has many good points, but we are in need of gentler and more objective criteria for its successful use."—Aldo Leopold



Did Leopold write this seven decades ago, or last week?

Our attitudes haven't moved as fast as he would have hoped toward embracing the land as a community to which we belong. Meanwhile, our tools advance at a dizzying pace.

That is why you—standing together with this community of thinking and caring people—are the antidote to the carelessness and shortsightedness defining success now, and the remedy that will help us build something stronger and more lasting. For those of us who continually try to pause for breath to strengthen the argument for an ecological world view, our connections provide continuity of care from past to future generations.

Which is why when I read the line above from Aldo Leopold, I think of his daughter, Dr. Estella B. Leopold Jr., who with her siblings founded this organization over forty years ago to carry forward care and consideration for future generations.

I think of Estella, and also of a line of fellow concerned—and notably female—protesters standing arm-in-arm in front of bulldozers on the verge of destroying what would ultimately become the Florissant National Monument. Estella and her colleagues not only protested they had also documented the scientific values of the site. They built compelling moral arguments that protected the unique fossil record: A more important investment in the future.

I have to say, it is a fraught time to call oneself a conservationist, or environmentalist—but perhaps that is why it is so important to be a conservationist right now—because more than ever, the world needs a reminder that the land is us, and we are the land, and for any of us to have health, and true wealth, we need healthy land that shares its beauty, blessings, and benefits with all of us in return.

Collectively, we build our commitment and capability to think and thus act ethically in this rapidly changing world. So, buckle up, and bear down, and know that together we will continue to learn and love all this wild world has to offer.

Wildly Yours,

Buddy Huffaker
President and Executive Director

A Difference Maker from the Beginning

As a child growing up in Madison, Wisconsin, I would often pull *A Sand County Almanac* down from my parents' bookshelf to look at Charles Schwartz' intriguing pencil drawings. As I grew older, I started reading the more accessible passages, and eventually came to appreciate Leopold's more abstract essays. Even now, roughly 65 years after I first encountered his work, I find something new with each reading.

In 1981, the Leopold family asked me to help form a nonprofit organization to take title to the Shack property and Leopold's copyrights. That organization, originally named the Aldo Leopold Shack Foundation, evolved into the Aldo Leopold Foundation of today. After decades serving as pro bono legal counsel, I joined the Board following my retirement from private practice.

Serving on the ALF Board has been a great experience. We receive excellent support and leadership from the staff, most notably our Executive Director, Buddy Huffaker, who sets a tone of mutual respect and appreciation. My fellow directors bring expertise from science, academia, and business. Most of us have experience as stewards of private or public land—in my case, my partner, Carrie Nelson, and I share 56 acres of oak savannah, wetlands, and pine relict habitat in Iowa County, Wisconsin with otters, sandhill cranes, brown trout, and myriad other wild creatures. The Board and staff's shared experiences outside of our meetings have been especially meaningful: gathering in the ALF blind to watch cranes come in to roost on the Wisconsin River, meeting with Forest Service representatives in the shadow of the Gila Cliff Dwellings, sharing suppers and swapping stories with Leopold Fellows at the Legacy Center. I feel lucky to have the opportunity to work with and learn from this amazing group of leaders.

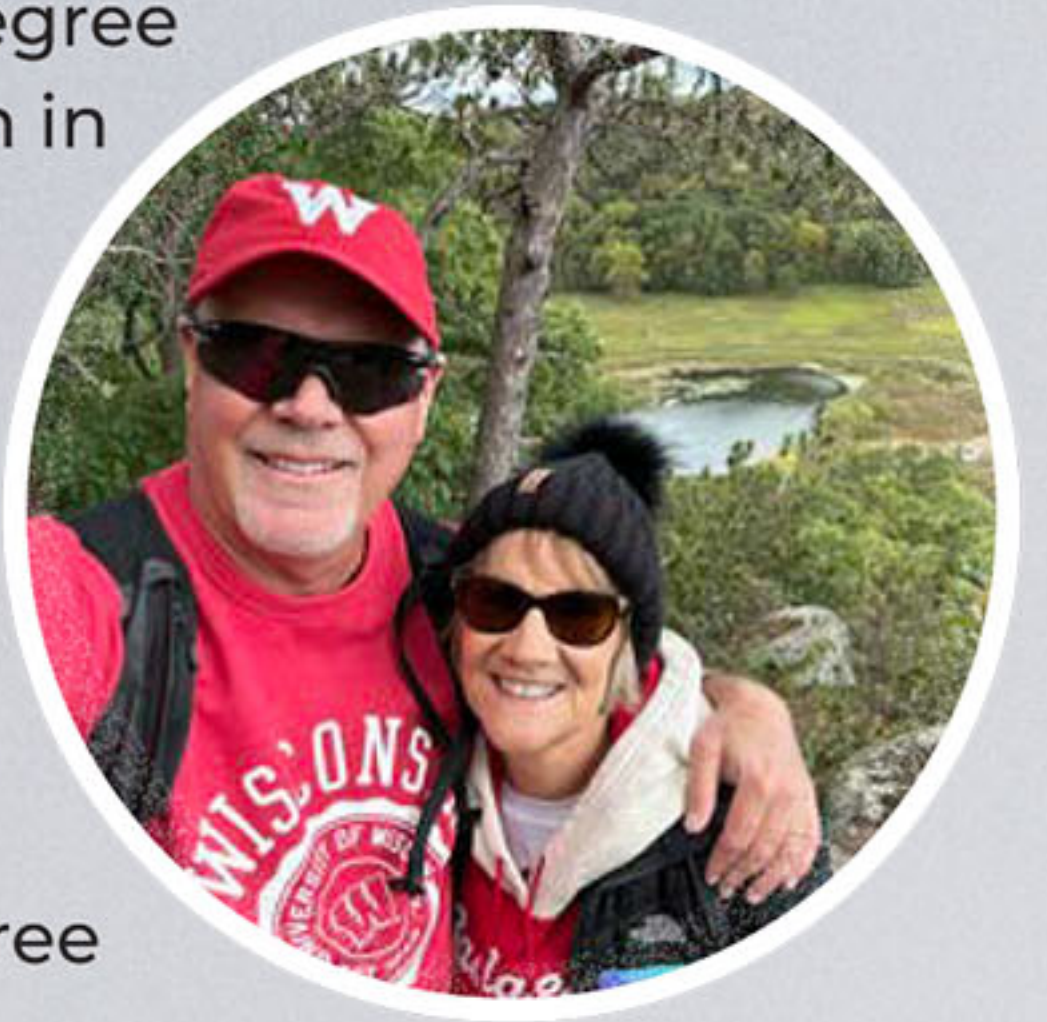


Looking forward, I'm excited about ALF's mission of empowering people to understand, appreciate, and protect natural communities wherever and however they connect. I'm especially enthusiastic about *Land Ethic Live!* and the expansion of our conservation leadership programs. Of course, care of the Shack and surrounding land, where it all began, remain the foundation for everything we do.

—Anne Ross, Current Board Chair

Leading into the Future

I was first introduced to Aldo Leopold and *A Sand County Almanac* in high school. My great aunt, who earned an advanced degree in botany from UW-Madison in the 1920s, spoke at length about Leopold's book and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. I read both and was deeply impacted — those two books had a significant influence on my decision to earn an undergraduate degree in environmental biology.



Although I spent my professional career in business, I was never far from my love of conservation and the land ethic. I was introduced to the Aldo Leopold Foundation while my wife Sarah and I were building a home with Andy Fieber and Aldo Partners, a firm that was also building the Future Leaders Center in Baraboo. When Buddy came to pitch the board opening, I was also being approached by other conservation organizations. I'm glad I chose ALF.

The best part of the ALF board is the people and the work to which they're committed. Buddy's enthusiasm and dedication to the organization are infectious — he creates a great environment for the board to do its best work. The highlight experience for me was our 2024 trip to New Mexico and the Gila Wilderness. Seeing the spot where Leopold began to formulate the land ethic concept was amazing, and it had a lasting effect on my own views of a land ethic. I will cherish that trip forever.

Serving as board chair was personally very rewarding. The directors on our board are all personally invested in the work — most are landowners, and I love hearing how they apply what we discuss in meetings to their own land. I own about 700 acres, and all of it will be managed with the land ethic at its core. That is a direct result of serving on this board.

I'm excited by ALF's direction and the strength of our board — talented, committed people who are in it for all the right reasons. I am incredibly grateful.

—Jack Salzwedel, Past Board Chair

Peter Dunwiddie



As a high school student in Neenah, Wisconsin, graduating in 1971, I was immersed in the energy and excitement of the environment, conservation, and Earth Day. A *Sand County Almanac* was assigned reading in a couple of my high school classes (including my father's). Our family practically lived in the outdoors, taking long family vacations camping, hiking, and canoeing around the country. Conservation was part of our DNA, so Aldo's book was well-studied.

As a first semester freshman at the University of Wisconsin in 1971, I signed up for Environmental Studies 101, and noticed that the instructor for one of the sections was a Leopold. So of course I signed up for that section, not knowing which Leopold it might be. It turned out to be Estella (the youngest daughter), on sabbatical from the US Geological Survey. She almost immediately became a mentor and guiding light right when I was trying to figure out my life and career trajectory. I was planning to spend the following summer in the Wind River Mountains of Wyoming, and Estella suggested I get in touch with her brother Luna who was building a home in the Pinedale area. I connected up with him, and ended up spending the following three summers in the Pinedale area. At first, I worked with him on several research projects and enjoyed the steady parade of Leopold family members, students, friends, and colleagues that passed through. In following summers, I carried out other studies on my own in the Wind River Mountains, but always under Luna's sage mentoring. The first became my undergraduate honors thesis, the second became my master's thesis and various other studies that gave me invaluable experience in the art, science, and joy of doing field research, pointing me down the road as a scientist.

After three years as a researcher at the University of Arizona, I was ready to get my doctorate. By that time Estella had moved to the University of Washington to lead the Quaternary Research Center and I became one of her first graduate students. I spent four wonderful years working closely with Estella immersed in the excitement of academic collegiality, and research. Upon graduation, the vicissitudes of the job market, and Estella's encouragement, saw me taking a post-doc position as an ecologist with a large conservation organization (Massachusetts Audubon Society). I soon realized I had landed well.

After thirteen years at MAS, I had become an expert in prescribed burning, conservation biology, and paleoecology, I moved back to Seattle to take a position with The Nature Conservancy and an affiliate faculty appointment in Biology and Forestry at the University of Washington. Needless to say, I was delighted to return once again to greater proximity to Estella. She invited me to join her on the Stewardship Advisory Committee at the Leopold Foundation, where I returned on a regular basis to learn and advise on restoration endeavors there.

I remained in close contact with Estella ever since, co-authoring a scientific paper with her based on some of our earlier research together, spending time with her in the San Juan Islands, and enjoying the warmth of our long association and friendship, growing from mentor-student to professional colleagues and friends.

My association with ALF—an entity that was so treasured by Estella—continues to be one that I have fostered, both because it embodies a cause I strongly embrace and provides a tangible way to give back and honor the Leopold family and all they did. I am grateful to continue to help support the advancement of the land ethic, which has fundamentally shaped the conservation world, and on a much more personal level, shaped and transformed my own life in so many ways.

Peter is an affiliate professor in the Biology Department and in the School of Environmental and Forest Sciences at the University of Washington, where he continues to do research on things that particularly catch his interest, a list that is still rather long. (Most scientists don't retire—they just stop getting paid to do what they love!)

Jim Van Ness



I first read Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* in 1967 as a freshman at Iowa State University—recommended reading for an Ecology class. I enjoyed it so much that my copy is still in my library, having escaped being sold back for pizza money.

After law school at the University of Iowa, I began a 45-year legal career in government service—23 years as a U.S. Air Force judge advocate, then 22 as a civilian attorney in the Department of Defense Office of General Counsel. After receiving an advanced law degree in 1984, environmental law became my primary focus. Throughout my career, Leopold's land ethic regularly informed the advice I provided.

In 1998, my colleague Bruce Beard and I attended a Leopold Education Project workshop hosted by the Foundation. It began with a canoe trip down the Wisconsin River to the iconic Leopold Shack. There, we met Buddy Huffaker and, through him, Nina Leopold Bradley. With her kind support, we organized a 1999 conference titled "Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic: A Legacy for Public Land Management"—a career highlight and the start of a lifelong friendship with Buddy.

I believe the Foundation is engaged in vitally important work. Everyone exposed to Leopold's legacy and the land ethic is better equipped to make thoughtful land use decisions, and the "champions" the Foundation produces go on to influence countless others who might never otherwise encounter these principles. Our best hope is for young people to be introduced to the natural environment and all its wonders. Supporting them and equipping them to bring others into the fold is a mission deserving my support.

My wife and I had been donating to the Foundation with after-tax dollars. When I turned 73, I was required to begin taking required minimum distributions (RMDs) from my IRA. I discovered that by directing my IRA administrator to transfer my RMDs straight to my preferred charities, those withdrawals are not taxable income—allowing me to make more generous donations without first paying taxes on the withdrawals.

Jim Van Ness is now (mostly) retired, ending his career as a Senior Associate General Counsel in the Office of the Deputy General Counsel for Environment, Energy, and Installations in the Department of Defense Office of General Counsel, where he served as an attorney for 25 years.

Jim and Ina Jo Van Ness reside on Maryland's Eastern Shore, where they enjoy volunteer work, birding, fishing, and reading.

Your Support Strengthens the Leopold-Pines Conservation Area Land Stewardship Model

"A rare bird or flower need remain no rarer than the people willing to venture their skill in building it a habitat." —Aldo Leopold



Thanks to you, 2025 produced full seasons of healthy growth on the land we care for and share with the world. Our land stewardship mission within a mission is to maintain the Leopold Shack and farm and restore the 4,000 acres in our care that surround it, known as the Leopold-Pines Conservation Area (LPCA).

Prior to the farming practices that "wore out" this Sand County land, this part of the Midwest was a combination of tallgrass prairie and oak savanna, where grassland birds flourished. Our decades-long plan is to model the restoration of that habitat and welcome the birds back.

Our most powerful tool is fire, nature's great physician. Last year we cleared 1,400 feet of new burn breaks and burned 495 acres, nearly 15% of the LPCA. We completed over 50 acres of complementary understory cleanup to improve habitat for savanna birds and notably wild turkeys. Seven acres of buckthorn was removed, and we treated so much invasive spotted knapweed we lost count.

BioBlitz

And wildlife is thriving here! In June, Milwaukee Public Museum held its annual BioBlitz on the LPCA. During an action-packed twenty-four hours, hundreds of scientists and volunteers looked closely at the diversity of life on this land and its surrounding waters, identifying 1,235 species of plant, animal, bird, insect invertebrate, fungus, and more.

New Milwaukee BioBlitz Record—1,235 species identified in 24 hours!



A few of these (Missouri burrowing spider, red-headed woodpecker, and Henslow's sparrow) are indicator species that reflect the quality of our preserved and restored habitats.

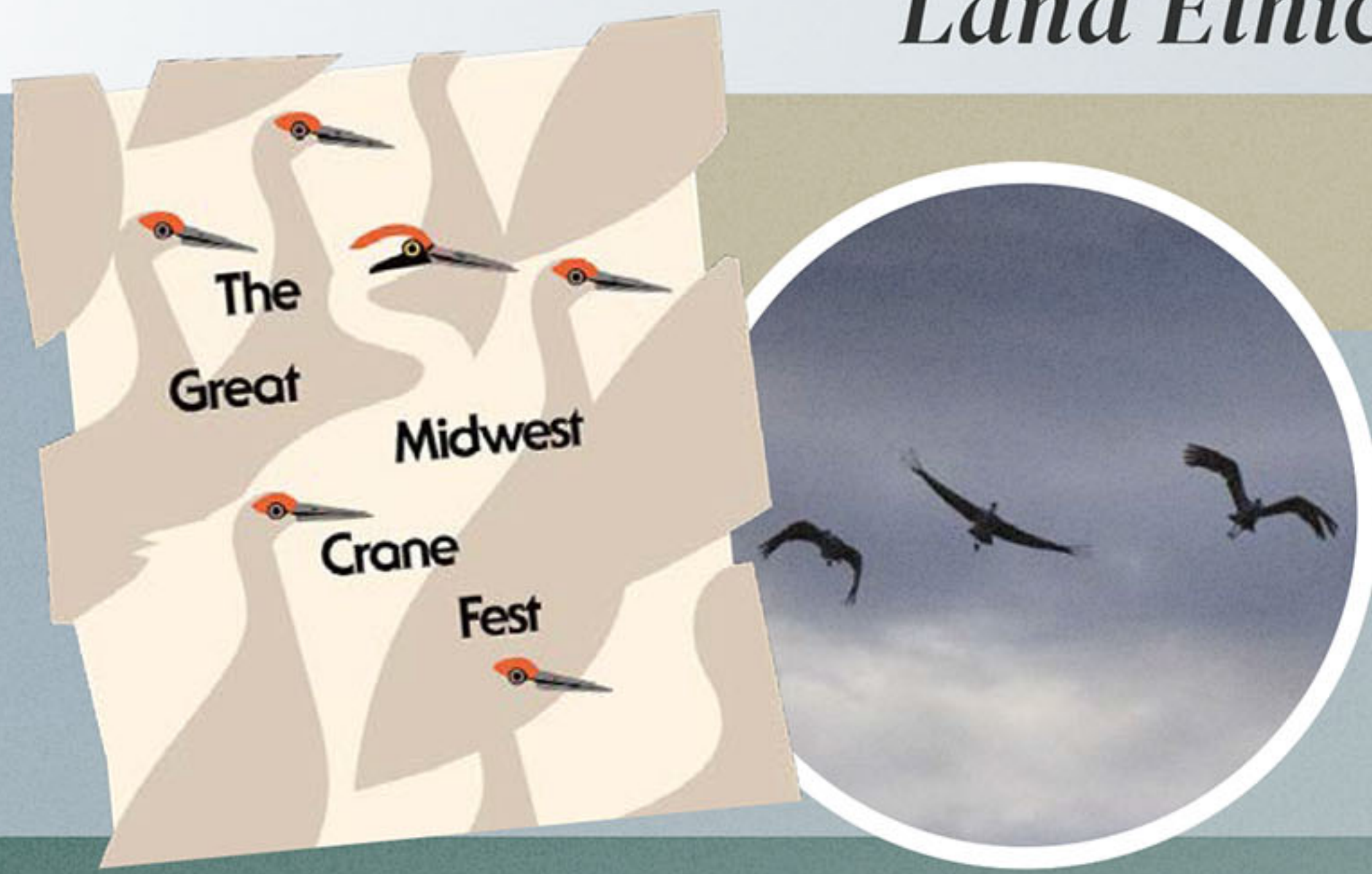
Cranes, Cranes, Cranes!

At this place, the very setting for Leopold's ominous, literary goodbye to the sandhill crane ("Marshland Elegy"), tens of thousands of cranes now congregate annually on the Wisconsin River's sandbars behind the Shack in November.

We again hosted hundreds of "craniacs" in our blinds, and thousands more during the 2025 Great Midwest Crane Fest, that we held with our friends at the nearby International Crane Foundation. We thank you for investing in this natural spectacle and conservation success!



Land Ethic Happenings in 2025



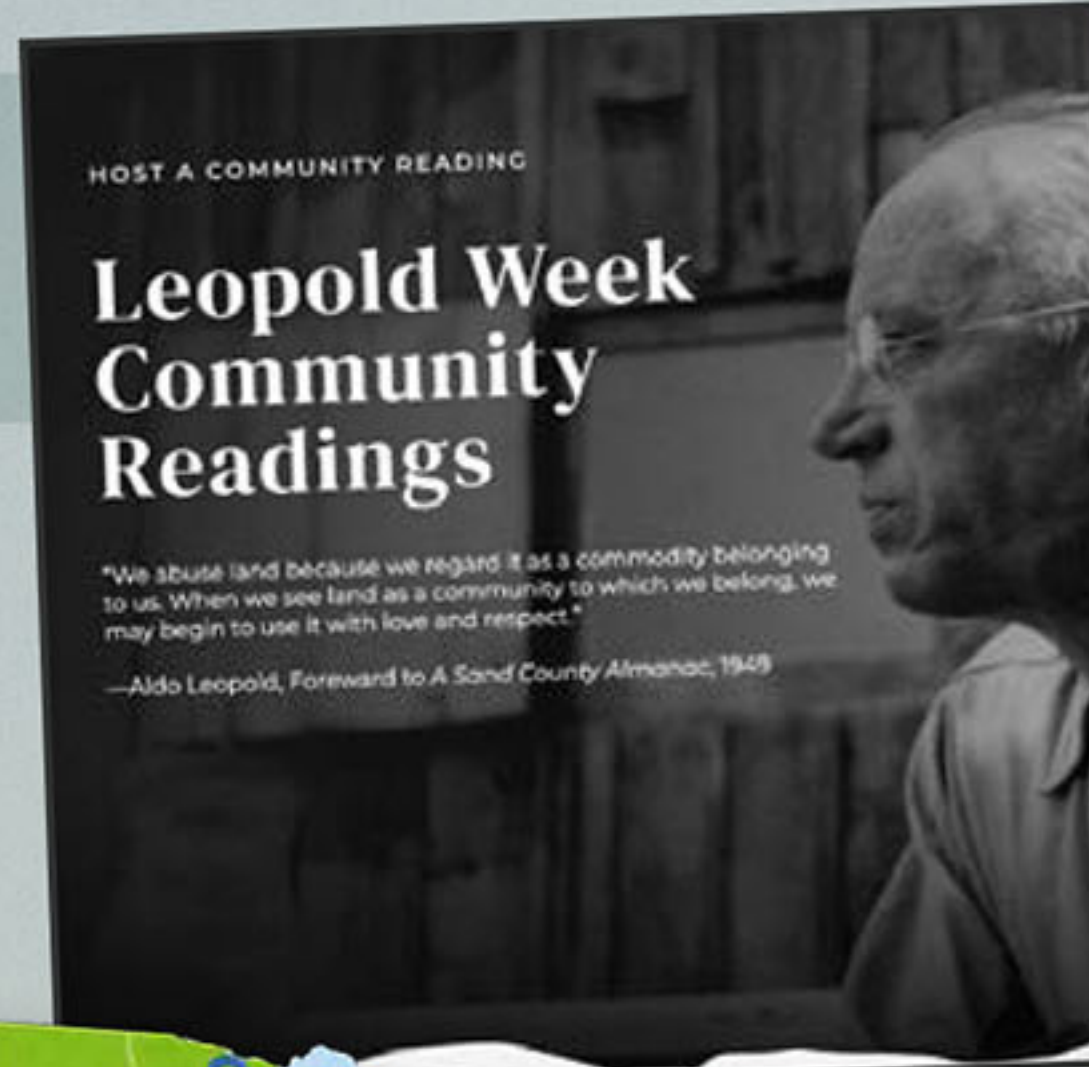
Great Midwest Crane Fest had a Record Number of Attendees

We had something special flying this fall with our neighbors, the International Crane Foundation. The fourth-annual Great Midwest Crane Fest in November welcomed a record number of enthusiasts to both of our locales. A sellout crowd of nearly 1,300 “craniacs” spent two days observing thousands of cranes descend over the Shack.

Community Reads Grants

Leopold Week has grown! Initiated in 2004 by state decree in Wisconsin, the annual March event is celebrated today by thousands of people around the country with staged public readings of *A Sand County Almanac*. The tradition was started by the late Dr. Tom Heberlein of Lodi, Wisconsin, who first gathered readers in 2000 to partake in “Lodi Reads Leopold.”

In his honor, and with support from his estate and from donors like you, we launched a grant program in 2025 so that communities everywhere can hold a reading event during Leopold Week—bringing *A Sand County Almanac* into libraries, classrooms, and living rooms across the country. We send complimentary copies of the book and everything readers need to get started. In our first granting year, twenty-three communities, from California to New England, are gathering this March to read Aldo Leopold.



Marshland Market Notes New Journal

Record merchandise sales in 2025 were boosted by another strong year for Phenology Calendar sales, and intense interest (and purchases) in the all-new Journal and Planner. Designed and produced by ALF staff, this beautiful notebook is inspired by the Leopold family's long tradition of journaling, and will inspire you to bring clarity, creativity, and connection to every day. You can get yours by going to www.aldoleopold.org.



In the News

“Aldo Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac* ... is probably the most influential conservation-environmental text. It was written by a guy who knew what it was to chop a tree down, what it was to raise a crop, who knew what it was to hunt deer, who knew what it was to kill something and then regret killing it. He was talking to his people, and he was saying ... no one’s going [to] save this but us, no one understands it and loves it like us.”

—Steve Rinella, interview with *The New York Times* in November 2025

Steve Rinella, popular outdoors podcaster—#1 in the U.S. Wilderness category—reminded *The New York Times* worldwide audience how foundational Leopold’s thinking remains to today’s hunting and conservation communities.

20,000+
Land Ethic Live!
registrations
in 2025

“Thanks for another great Leopold Week series, ALF!”—Thomas Dean

Land Ethic Live!

The 2025 audience registrations for the Foundation’s live programming topped 20,000 for the first time, and early numbers from 2026 show ongoing audience growth. LEL!’s Leopold Week featured Dr. Jennifer Grenz, Alexis Nikole Nelson, and Dr. Dacher Keltner, a three-part speaker series that explored the connection, nourishment and awe surrounding the land ethic. 5,398 land lovers registered for those three LEL! conversations.

Land Ethic Live!
Leopold Week
—2026—
7 P.M. CDT

Dr. Jennifer Grenz
Tuesday, March 10

Alexis Nikole Nelson
Wednesday, March 11

Dr. Dacher Keltner
Thursday, March 12

Land Ethic in Action

Explore Stories by Key Principles

Scan Me

A Land Ethic in Action Web Hub

We think it’s time to tell the stories of the good deeds of so many. We built the *Land Ethic in Action* web hub in the summer of 2025. Already, there have been many hundreds of visits to these stories, with a 433% increase in active users per month to the web hub.

Join the exhilaration on our website!
Scan the QR code.

Development News

The future looks bright as the sun over the rimrock! The Foundation’s 2025 overall revenue was up 26%, at \$2.6 Million in donations, over 2024. All that from 1,500 donors, nearly 30% of whom were new donors to the Aldo Leopold Foundation.

The FY 10/1/24-9/30/25 financial statement is available. Scan the QR code to view.



Scan Me

30% New Donors
for a total
of 1,500
Donors

2025 Revenue
2.6
Million
in Donations

26%
Increase
over 2024

The Land Ethic is Going New-school

The Aldo Leopold Foundation staff is in the design/build phase of a Land Ethic® curriculum slated for 2027. Intended for early-to-mid-career conservation professionals, this certified course of study will be offered online with ample human interface. More on this exciting certification program soon.



From the Founders to the Future!

Estella Bergere Leopold, the last living child of Aldo and Estella Leopold, passed in 2024 at 97. Along with her siblings, Estella established this foundation in 1982, building a bridge from Aldo to us and into the forever future. A \$2 million endowment built last year by you in Estella’s name will honor her enormous contributions to natural science, this foundation, and the land ethic!

25 Years of Reflections on Living the Land Ethic

Thanks to your ongoing support, after 25 years, ALF fellows continue to impact the world. Go to [Sand County Blog](#) (QR code below) to read their impactful stories in full.



STEFFAN FREEMAN

Today I serve as Senior Land Steward at the Jackson Hole Land Trust, protecting wildlife habitat and working agricultural lands across the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem—one of the last intact ecosystems on the planet. The

road here passed through Baraboo, Wisconsin, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

My fellowship at the Aldo Leopold Foundation gave me something no classroom could: an immersive, unhurried encounter with the land ethic. Living in a small cabin on the Foundation's land, with no television and a growing stack of library books, I had space to think, to absorb, and to begin forming a personal land ethic rooted in the understanding that we are plain members of the land community, not its masters. The prescribed fires, the seed collecting, the prairie restoration work—these were a kind of tutelage in belonging to a place.

The mentorship was equally shaping. Regular lunches at Nina Leopold Bradley's table. Conversations with Buddy Huffaker and Steve Swenson about how passionate, mission-driven leadership actually functions. Seeing Charlie Bradley's face light up after a prescribed burn of "Charlie's Prairie"—a moment of pure, wordless connection to the land. All of these remain vivid memories.

The Leopold name opens doors. Among conservation practitioners, agricultural communities, government agencies, and academics, mentioning the Aldo Leopold Foundation carries real weight. That cachet has followed me through subsequent jobs and graduate school, and it continues to matter.

I keep copies of *A Sand County Almanac* on my desk and give them out like candy—to every new coworker, every summer seasonal hire. Leopold's vision for a land ethic is as urgent as ever. ALF made that vision live in me, and I try to pass it forward every chance I get.



Pictured: Amy, Josh, and Steffan in 2001



JOSH LAPOINTE

Today I lead restoration teams across the Midwest as Regional Operations Manager at Resource Environmental Solutions—the nation's largest ecological restoration company. We design, build, and sustain sites that restore impaired ecosystems to health through stream and wetland restoration, prescribed fire, invasive removal, native seeding, and dam removal. It is exactly the field Nina Leopold Bradley once told me was coming.

I remember the afternoon clearly. Nina and I were sorting seed collections and talking through the day's work when she remarked that ecological restoration would one day become a significant business opportunity, as the damage from our interference with nature would only continue to grow. The comment was quiet and matter-of-fact, the way Nina said most important things. It stayed with me for decades.

My fellowship was where conservation stopped being a concept and became a practice. I completed my first burn seasons with Steve Swenson and Jeb Barzen, who served as burn boss—learning the discipline and patience fire demands, working hand tools only, building strong lines. From there came seasons of garlic mustard management, seed collection across remnant prairies and Crane Foundation properties, and that first prairie seeding alongside Nina, fellow fellows, and volunteers, laying out what we called "Amy's Prairie."

ALF taught me that the land ethic is not a philosophy you hold at a distance—it is a moral orientation you live inside. It expanded my understanding of community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, and shifted my view of conservation from passive protection to active, relational stewardship. Not "What can we take?" but "What are we obligated to give back?"

Those questions continue to guide every decision I make in the field today.



JEFF VOLTZ

Twenty-five years ago, Nina Leopold Bradley looked up from a conversation about buckthorn and prickly ash and suggested I consider a career advancing conservation policy. At the time, I struggled to understand what she meant, let alone how one advanced conservation without the assistance of a brush saw. It took patience, persistence, and the better part of two decades to fully appreciate what she saw in me that afternoon.

Today I serve as Director of Agriculture and Water Quality at the Wisconsin DNR. My office creates space for scientists, conservationists, agricultural producers, and federal, state, and local government to partner on science and policy that promotes healthy land and productive farms. It is the career Nina imagined for me—built on the same conviction Leopold expressed in his 1939 essay "The Farmer as a Conservationist": that when land does well for its owner, and the owner does well by his land, and both end up better for their partnership, we have conservation.

My time at ALF gave me field skills and space to think—to sit with conservation leaders at the Shack, to share meals from Nina's garden, to ask questions and listen carefully to the answers. Nina's phenology conversations ranged far beyond the Leopold Reserve, drifting into discussions about life, current events, and our visions for a better future. In those moments, she made me feel part of something larger than myself.

My wife, Kaley, and I named our only daughter Nina. Every morning when I say "Good morning, Nina" to my daughter, I am reminded of how much that remarkable woman's investment in a young fellow still shapes the work I do and the person I am.



AMY SOMMERS

One of my favorite Aldo Leopold quotes is,

"There are two things that interest me: the relation of people to each other, and the relation of people to land."

Exploring those interests, along with exploring the land itself, has been much of the focus of my life. At work, I bring students together to build community and at home, much of my focus is on the land and my family's relationship with it, each other, and our community.

The lessons from *A Sand County Almanac* and my time at ALF are not incorporated into my life because of my work, but because I simply see incorporating these lessons as the ethical way to live. I work a 1/2 acre plot of land, tending native plants and a fruit and vegetable garden. When a neighbor is in search of plants for their garden, we always have something to split and share. My family keeps a phenology journal, not as rigorously as Nina Leopold Bradley did, but we celebrate the first blooms and berries. We talk about the power of nature and having respect for the natural world, and we have shared together awe over a myriad of landscapes.

The most pivotal memories of my time at ALF revolve around the community. Amidst potlucks, work parties, seed collecting, prairie burns and more, there are so many wonderful stories. As Nina Leopold Bradley once said,

"The Shack was everything, and it was nothing."

The Shack is a catalyst that brings so many people together. Those connections between people and the land and people and each other taught me about resilience, leadership, and community.

Go to [Sand County Blog](#) (QR code linked here) to read their entire stories.



SCAN ME



From Sonoran Topminnow to Good Oak, My Life's Journey

by Gary Meffe

In 1979, early in my Ph.D. program at Arizona State University, I met Phil Pister at a meeting of the Desert Fishes Council. I learned over time that this unassuming individual (a former student of Starker Leopold) was already becoming a conservation legend. Among other accomplishments, he had single-handedly saved an entire species of pupfish from extinction! We quickly became friends. Pister casually asked at one point if I was familiar with this Aldo Leopold fellow, and his book, *A Sand County Almanac*. I was not, and he suggested that I might want to take a look at it. Well, I did, and was hooked.

Years later, my wife Nancy and I were in Wisconsin and spent a day or two with our dear friend Curt Meine. He took us to the International Crane Foundation and to the Leopold Foundation. Wow!

Nina Leopold Bradley gave us a tour and of course we ended at the Shack. I got chills just looking at it. So simple, and yet so profound. We sat down inside to chat, and Nina casually mentioned that "Dad" had built the chair I was sitting in. I immediately sprang up, said I had no idea that it was his chair, and apologized profusely for sitting there! She and Curt laughed, and she assured me it was fine, the chair was meant to be sat on. They finally convinced me to settle back down, but I did not feel close to worthy of such an honor. I was simply awestruck that I was sitting in Aldo Leopold's chair!

I was a Zoology major in college and fell in love with ecology in my sophomore year, thanks to a fantastic teacher and role model—Ted Stiles at Rutgers. The man knew every vertebrate, invertebrate, and plant, and by example pointed me in the right direction. I always liked freshwater fish, so when I went to ASU for my Ph.D., I worked on an endangered desert fish, the Sonoran topminnow. Through years of working with endangered species—and with Phil Pister's influence—land use, habitat destruction, and a land ethic became central to my work.

My career eventually developed to the point where I co-authored two college textbooks on conservation biology and ecosystem management. I also was Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Conservation Biology** for 12 years. Leopold and the land ethic were always deeply underpinning all of that work.

"The mission and work of the Aldo Leopold Foundation is...foundational! It underlays and informs everything we do in conservation practice. Without an ethic to guide us, our work would be like a missile without a guidance system (as Phil Pister has said)."

I met executive director Buddy Huffaker many years ago when he attended a training course on ecosystem management that I was teaching with three colleagues. It was quickly apparent during that week that the Foundation was in excellent hands with Buddy. His devotion to and leadership of the Foundation over the years has proven my judgment to be accurate. So, in thinking of the legacies we wish to leave when we depart this world, Nancy and I wanted our resources to go to places that we trust to use them wisely. It was a 'natural selection' to include the Good Oak Society in our bequests. The work of the Leopold Foundation continues to instill trust, and to educate and expand the circle of love for the land, and hope for the future.

**a Wiley-Blackwell imprint*

Gary Meffe is retired from a career as Research Professor at the University of Georgia, and Adjunct Professor at the University of Florida. Gary and Nancy are living happily in Brandon, Vermont, a fantastic community of genuine and caring people.

The Good Oak Society is a society of honored land lovers who pledge a legacy gift to the Aldo Leopold Foundation.



Learn more at: www.aldoleopold.org/join-and-support/ways-to-give



Scan Me

IRAs, QCDs, RMDs, DAFs, and ALF —oh my!

Navigating the world of retirement funds feels like a lesson in three-letter acronyms (TLAs). The good news? There are simple ways to use these funds to support the land ethic and potentially reduce your own tax burden.

If you have an Individual Retirement Account (IRA), you are likely familiar with the Required Minimum Distribution (RMD)—a taxable withdrawal the IRS requires you to take each year, generally when you reach age 73. Did you know that by making a simple change, you can reduce some of the tax burden of your RMD and support the land ethic at the same time? Normally, your Required Minimum Distribution is sent to you, where it counts towards your taxable income. Instead, you can request a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD)—a direct transfer from your IRA to a qualifying charitable organization. QCDs are then excluded from your taxable income and can satisfy all or part of an RMD. The good news is that the Aldo Leopold Foundation (ALF) is a qualified charitable organization. Your QCD to ALF helps advance the land ethic by supporting conservation education, land stewardship and the interpretation of Aldo Leopold's legacy, while satisfying your IRS requirements and reducing your tax liability.

Anyone age 70 ½ or older with a qualifying IRA can make a QCD of up to \$111,000 per individual in 2026. Of course, there are rules and limitations, so we encourage you to ask your financial advisor if making a QCD to ALF from your IRA to satisfy your RMD is right for you!

Do you have a donor-advised fund?

Donor-advised funds (DAFs) offer immediate tax benefits and long-term philanthropic flexibility. A donor-advised fund is opened with an initial, irrevocable investment, for which you receive an immediate tax benefit. Some DAFs have very low minimum contribution requirements, and there is no minimum age to open an account!

The assets contributed to the DAF are invested and managed by a public charity (such as a community foundation, a national organization affiliated with a financial institution, or other charitable organization). You retain advisory rights to recommend grants from the DAF to qualified charities that you choose. Because the assets you originally contributed to the DAF continue to grow, you may be able to achieve higher long-term philanthropic goals.

If you have a DAF, it's easy to log into your account to see how your investment has grown and consider recommending a grant to ALF in support of the land ethic.

If you are curious about opening a Donor-Advised Fund, check with your financial advisor, local community foundation or other charity for recommendations.

Consider leaving a legacy

Many of the Foundation's most significant successes were the direct result of generous gifts resulting from donors' estate planning. If you've already included the Aldo Leopold Foundation in your estate plan, thank you! If you are contemplating your philanthropic and conservation legacy, please remember that you can name the Aldo Leopold Foundation as a beneficiary on your IRA and DAF accounts, as well as life insurance policies. Contact your IRA custodian or DAF account holder for details.

A guide to TLAs (Three-letter acronyms)

IRA: Individual Retirement Account, to which you contribute pre-tax dollars, and which allows your money to grow tax-deferred. Withdrawals made after age 59½ are taxed as income.

RMD: Required Minimum Distribution is the minimum amount you must withdraw from your retirement accounts (Traditional IRA, SEP, SIMPLE) each year, generally starting at age 73.

QCD: Qualified Charitable Distribution is a direct transfer of funds from an IRA custodian to a qualified 501(c)(3) charity (such as the Aldo Leopold Foundation), bypassing the IRA owner. QCDs can be made at age 70½.

DAF: A donor-advised fund is an account into which you deposit assets that are used to make charitable donations over time.

ALF: The Aldo Leopold Foundation is a tax-exempt organization as described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code; EIN: 39-1423225.

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