

**ALDO LEOPOLD SHACK AND FARM**

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**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:  
 Nationally: X Statewide:    Locally:   

Applicable National

Register Criteria: A X B X C \_ D \_

Criteria Considerations

(Exceptions): A \_ B \_ C \_ D \_ E \_ F \_ G \_NHL Criteria: 2

NHL Theme(s):

II. Creating Social Institutions and Movements  
     2. Reform movements  
 VI. Expanding Science and Technology  
     3. Scientific thought and theory  
 VII. Transforming the Environment  
     3. Protecting and preserving the environment

Areas of Significance: Conservation, Literature, Philosophy, SciencePeriod(s) of Significance: 1935-1948Significant Dates: 1935, 1936, 1948Significant Person(s): Aldo LeopoldCultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder:

Historic Contexts:

XIX. Literature  
     C. Non-Fiction  
 XXXII. Conservation of Natural Resources  
     C. The Conservation Movement Matures  
         1. Emergence of Federal Conservation Legislation  
         2. Birth of Wildlife Management  
         8. Wilderness System

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**State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.**Summary

The Aldo Leopold Farm is nationally significant under Criterion 2 for its association with Aldo Leopold and his contributions to conservation. As a forester, writer, professor, and conservationist, Leopold had tremendous impact on natural resource conservation in America in the early to mid-twentieth century, and his influence has continued to expand since his death. Leopold pioneered the science and profession of wildlife management and his conservation philosophies led to the establishment of national policies on forestry, game management, watershed management and soil conservation. Even more significant has been the continuing influence of his concept of land health and his land ethic philosophy in the years since his death. Leopold's professional contributions and writing have influenced fields as diverse as forest ecology and management, range ecology and management, outdoor recreation, wildlife ecology and management, soil and water conservation, sustainable agriculture, wilderness, ecological restoration, biodiversity and conservation biology, private land policy, public land policy, conservation advocacy, conservation economics, environmental policy, hunting and fishing, environmental history, education, esthetics, the integration of arts and sciences, environmental philosophy and ethics, and literature.<sup>9</sup> Aldo Leopold is fundamental in the history of conservation; his name is as recognized and respected as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir and Rachel Carson, and one could argue that his influence on conservation thought and practice in our own day has exceeded theirs.

During his career in the U.S. Forest Service (1909-1928), Aldo Leopold led the way in building ecological foundations for resource management, and as the leader of pioneering game surveys (1928-1933) and then as holder of the first chair in wildlife management in the nation at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (1933-1948), he led the way in establishing a national game policy and laying the groundwork for the new profession and science of wildlife management. He recommended the first federal wilderness area designation, in the Gila National Forest in New Mexico in 1924, and was a leading advocate for a national wilderness preservation system that was given force of law in 1964 and has since grown to more than 100 million acres. During his years as a professor and through observations during his travels in Germany and Mexico in the mid-1930s, especially his observations and experiences attempting to restore his farm to ecological integrity, Leopold developed his mature philosophy, including his concepts of land health and a land ethic. Leopold is considered one of the pioneers of ecological restoration, which he carried out on a private scale at his sand county farm. The Aldo Leopold property is "significant as the embodiment of the esthetic perception and wild land husbandry of twentieth-century America's most highly regarded wildlife ecologist and environmental philosopher, Aldo Leopold."<sup>10</sup> Leopold authored three published books and about five hundred articles, essays, newsletters, reports, reviews and other published items on forestry, wildlife management, conservation, environmental philosophy and related topics.<sup>11</sup> He served as an officer or consultant for over a hundred professional societies and committees, environmental agencies, conservation organizations, and periodicals. Leopold's literary classic, *A Sand County Almanac*, is by far his best known publication.

Many of the essays in *A Sand County Almanac* (1949) are set on the small farm in the sand county of central

<sup>9</sup> Curt Meine and Richard L. Knight, eds., *The Essential Aldo Leopold: Quotations and Commentaries* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999). The book offers characteristic quotations from Leopold's vast writings together with commentaries by prominent scholars to establish his contributions to developments in each of these fields.

<sup>10</sup> Susan L. Flader, "Aldo Leopold Shack," National Register of Historic Places Nomination, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C., 1978, Section 8.

<sup>11</sup> Susan L. Flader and J. Baird Callicott, eds., *The River of the Mother of God and Other Essays by Aldo Leopold* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991). The book contains selections revealing the range of Leopold's writing and a complete bibliography of his publications.

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Wisconsin that Leopold acquired in 1935 shortly after he joined the university faculty. Arranged according to the cycle of the seasons from January to December, they tell what Leopold and his family observed and experienced as they sought to restore the exhausted land to some measure of healthy function by planting trees and shrubs, grasses and wildflowers. Other essays deal with his experiences elsewhere on the continent and several wrestle with more philosophical issues of ecology, esthetics and ethics, but it is the simple essays focused on his sand farm that resonate most with readers. In them he develops the theme of participating as “plain member and citizen” of the land community and illustrates most vividly what is involved in a land ethic “a conviction of individual responsibility for the health of the land.” This emphasis on the responsibility of the individual to maintain and restore the health of the land community—soils, waters, plants and animals—goes beyond his predecessors in the conservation arena, such as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir and Gifford Pinchot, who emphasized perception of natural processes or looked to the government for solutions.

Although all facets of his career and all the places he experienced—from his childhood along the Mississippi River in Iowa to his school days in New Jersey and Connecticut, his years as a forester in the Southwest, his work throughout the Midwest, his years in Madison, and his visits to Germany, Mexico, and Canada—helped to shape his land ethic philosophy, no place was more vital to his mature reflection or is more associated in the public mind with his ecological, esthetic and ethical philosophy than his sand county farm.

In the years since his death while helping a neighbor fight a fire near his farm in 1948, Leopold’s influence has continued to grow. The case he made during the 1920s and ‘30s for establishment of a system of wilderness areas was given the force of law in the National Wilderness Preservation Act of 1964. His writings, especially *A Sand County Almanac*, enjoyed a surge in popularity during the third environmental movement of the late 1960s and the 1970s, when his ideas began to shape the emerging fields of environmental ethics and environmental history. Although the professions of forestry and wildlife management moved in directions contrary to what he envisioned for several decades after World War II, by the 1990s the new fields of conservation biology and restoration ecology, inspired to a great extent by his ideas and practices, began to permeate universities and land management agencies. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS), which had been guided by Pinchot’s principle of scientific management in the twentieth century, began evoking Leopold’s ideas to undergird its new approach to ecosystem management at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Perhaps most significant, Leopold’s conviction of individual responsibility for the health of the land, exemplified most fully in *A Sand County Almanac* and at his sand county farm, has helped inspire the burgeoning of community-based conservation efforts and organizations in sustainable agriculture, watershed partnerships, ecosystem restoration, urban gardens, stream teams, energy efficiency, sustainable development and other forms of community revitalization in recent decades.

Aldo Leopold, his writings, and his Wisconsin farm continue to inspire conservation professionals and ordinary citizens alike. Owned and managed by the Aldo Leopold Foundation, the Leopold farm and the new Leopold Legacy Center are a magnet for people across the ideological spectrum and a popular setting for seminars, conferences, field sessions and heritage tourism related to Leopold’s land ethic.

### The Early Conservation Movement

The early conservation movement evolved in part under the influence of strong leaders such as Henry David Thoreau, George Perkins Marsh, Frederick Law Olmsted, John Muir, Gifford Pinchot, and Theodore Roosevelt, to name a few. Their philosophies regarding conservation though varied, helped foster early government support of conservation policies. Each generation of conservationists developed new ideals and institutions patterned to specific circumstances of the time and perceptions of human relationships with nature.

Thoreau’s spiritual connection with nature, developed during a two-year stay at a cabin at Walden Pond, led to

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his writing of the internationally known *Walden* (1854). Nature remained extremely important to humankind, though modern life appeared to be moving away from it. Time spent outdoors refreshed the soul, he believed, and he encouraged his generation to live more simply and deliberately, “lest in the ruthless quest for material possessions, Americans should lose a greater part of what was really worth possessing.”<sup>12</sup>

As the conservation movement gained momentum during the late nineteenth century, it included two groups of supporters—preservationists who strove to protect natural resources from excessive human development, and conservationists who approached land management in terms of rational scientific management. John Muir (1838-1914), naturalist and preservationist, thought of nature as valuable in its own regard and not just for human use and enjoyment. Fountain Lake Farm in Wisconsin, designated a National Historic Landmark on June 21, 1990, is the place where Muir lived as a boy; located at the edge of the sand county, it is not far from the Leopold farm. Though his father was a stern taskmaster, Muir developed a deep appreciation for the natural environment on the farm. He is considered one of the founding fathers of national parks for his writing and advocacy on behalf of Yosemite and other national parks, especially in the Sierra Nevada of California, and he helped set the stage for the next generation of preservationists. In arguing for federal preservation of Yosemite, Muir was joined by famed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, who had been the first head of the Yosemite Park Commission after Congress transferred the valley to the state of California for management in 1864, and by Robert Underwood Johnson, associate editor of *Century* magazine, who published Muir’s writings.

Gifford Pinchot, a Yale graduate who studied European forest management in France, institutionalized utilitarian forestry in the United States. President Grover Cleveland selected Pinchot to oversee the Division of Forestry in the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1898. In an obscure amendment in 1891, Congress had given the president authority to establish “forest reserves” on the public domain, but the Department of the Interior, not Agriculture, administered these areas. When Theodore Roosevelt became president, Pinchot worked with him in a 1905 legislation that transferred the reserves to a new U.S. Forest Service branch in the Department of Agriculture headed by Pinchot. Pinchot, whose father had endowed the first American graduate school of forestry at Yale in 1900, established a highly professional agency grounded in scientific management and sustained yield production that became a paragon of Progressive Era efficiency and order.

President Roosevelt, influenced by his love of hunting and other outdoor activities, was concerned not only with forests but also with wildlife. In addition to tripling the acreage of national forests, he established fifty-one national bird refuges in seventeen states and territories. Roosevelt also supported passage of the National Reclamation Act in 1902 and called the first White House Conference on Conservation in 1908. Although he had preservationist inclinations, his close association with Pinchot pulled him increasingly into a utilitarian political posture.

Like his predecessors, Aldo Leopold had elements of both preservationist esthetic sentiment and pragmatic utilitarianism in his makeup. His career would reveal a continual tension between the two and from that tension would develop his open, inquiring mind and interest in science, his commitment to professional expertise but also respect for citizen action, and, ultimately, his emphasis on personal obligation and his land ethic philosophy.

### Leopold’s Early Influences

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<sup>12</sup> “Conservation of Natural Resources,” (Washington, DC: National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings, National Park Service, 1963), 11.

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Aldo Leopold grew up in Burlington, Iowa, in a family that deeply appreciated nature and supported conservation of natural resources. His grandfather, Charles Starker, who was trained in architecture and engineering in Germany before migrating to Iowa, designed a number of buildings and parks in Burlington and was highly civic minded. His father was an inveterate hunter—but one who voluntarily refrained from shooting ducks in the spring out of a concern for conservation. His mother loved birds and wildflowers and nurtured her son's esthetic sense. The family planted a small red oak to celebrate Aldo's birth in 1887 and followed suit with each of their next three children.

Leopold grew up exploring, hunting and observing nature on the bluffs and bottomlands along the Mississippi River. He often kept records of bird species in his ever-present notebook, sometimes using his artistic talent to sketch them. His enjoyment of observing and chronicling nature would extend throughout his life. Each August the family went to the Les Cheneaux Club on Marquette Island in northern Lake Huron for more exploring plus boating and camping.

Though as the eldest son he might have been expected to join his father in the Leopold Desk Company, he wanted to study forestry at the new forest school at Yale. So he headed east to the Lawrenceville School in New Jersey in 1904 to prepare for Yale. His experiences at Lawrenceville made a lasting impression, as he took long tramps to study his new environs and developed a deep interest in botany. He wrote vividly of his observations to his mother, honing his writing skills by writing extensive letters home, a habit he continued at Yale and during the early years of his career until his marriage, after which letters home decreased as his professional correspondence mushroomed.

While Leopold studied in the Sheffield Scientific School at Yale and then in the Forest School, Pinchot was beginning to professionalize the fledgling U.S. Forest Service, drawing extensively on graduates from Yale. Leopold broadened his understanding of environment and society, reading such works as Roosevelt's *Outdoor Pastimes of an American Hunter*, *Principles of American Forestry* by Samuel Green, and Charles Darwin's *Vegetable Mould and Earthworms*, but he found himself increasingly preoccupied with the more technical aspects of silviculture and forestry.<sup>13</sup> He graduated in 1909 with a master's degree in forestry, including experience in forestry camps near the Pinchot estate in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania and in the piney woods and cypress swamps of east Texas. Leopold was immediately assigned to the Apache National Forest in Arizona Territory where forest administration was just then being organized.

### Forest Service Career

With a newly minted professional degree, the greenhorn from the East was assigned to head a timber reconnaissance crew of seasoned locals in the Apache National Forest. After a rough start with the locals, he learned quickly and was promoted in 1911 to the Carson National Forest in northern New Mexico. His life's ambition was to be a forest supervisor, and he achieved it by age 25. En route to the Carson, he met a woman in Santa Fe, Maria Alvira Estella Bergere, who belonged to one of the oldest and most established families in New Mexico, the Lunas, whom he married in 1912. They settled in a cabin, which is still extant, in the remote village of Tres Piedras, New Mexico. Estella nurtured his esthetic sense, as his mother had. She joined him on hunting trips, and later participated in archery and in planting trees and restoring the Wisconsin property.

Half a year after their wedding, Leopold was away for several weeks settling range disputes, camping out in rain and snow, when he became deathly ill with acute nephritis. He required seventeen months of recuperation, most of it back home in Burlington, and when he returned to the Forest Service he would have to take a less

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<sup>13</sup> Meine, *Aldo Leopold*, 55.

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taxing desk job at the southwestern district headquarters in Albuquerque. A relapse of the disease, brought on by overexertion, was thought to be fatal. During the interval, he had time to read and think about what he would do with whatever days or years remained to him, and he resolved to work on his first love, wildlife conservation.

Leopold took a post with the Office of Grazing with the USFS that would allow him to begin work on game protection. Along with domestic livestock, some of the nation's largest populations of wild game existed on national forest land, but the Forest Service did little to protect or manage them. Leopold conferred with national officials about game policy and then began work on a *Game and Fish Handbook*, which was the first such publication for the U.S. Forest Service.

In 1915 he became responsible for recreational policy for the southwestern district (Arizona and New Mexico), also a largely new endeavor for the Forest Service. The job included overseeing new recreational efforts and publicity, as well as continued coordination of the new game and fish program. His first assignment was to investigate conditions and prepare a survey/work plan for the Grand Canyon, at that time administered by the Forest Service. It was a major task for what the plan termed "the most important single administrative unit within the National Forests," and it would occupy him on and off for the next two years, during which he would also work on other recreational areas and begin a major effort to organize citizen game protective associations in Albuquerque and other communities throughout the Southwest. His campaign for a non-political "efficiency game warden" for New Mexico, undertaken through the newly created New Mexico Game Protective Association and its bulletin *The Pine Cone*, which Leopold edited, was so successful that by 1917 it earned him a personal letter of commendation from former president Theodore Roosevelt and the national gold medal of William T. Hornaday's Permanent Wild Life Protection Fund.

During World War I, Leopold briefly left the Forest Service to accept a newly created position as secretary (in effect, executive director) of the Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce. He hoped to broaden the chamber's interests to include city planning, public parks, street trees, a civic center with indigenous Spanish architecture, along with other progressive reforms. But a year and a half later he rejoined the Forest Service as assistant district forester in charge of operations on twenty million acres of national forests in the Southwest.

His new job entailed conducting inspections of individual forests, which gave him an opportunity to review conditions on the ground in places he had known from his earliest years in the Southwest. In the process, he became intensely interested in determining the causes and remedies for soil erosion on mountain watersheds throughout the region. The problem of erosion would become his chief preoccupation during his remaining years in the Southwest and a major interest for the rest of his life. While studying this problem, he devised a new, more efficient system of forest inspection for tracking changes on the ground (a system he regarded as one of his major accomplishments as a forest officer); he prepared a *Watershed Handbook* for the district (another first); he wrote some of the most penetrating ecological analyses of his career, most notably a classic titled "Grass, Brush, Timber and Fire in Southern Arizona" (a landmark in ecological literature); and he began to cast his conviction of human responsibility for dealing with the erosion problem in ethical terms—a harbinger of his land ethic, which at each successive articulation throughout his career would be presented at least in part in the context of his evolving thought about soil conservation.<sup>14</sup>

As assistant district forester, Leopold also continued his interest in wildlife populations making substantial progress on a book on game management in the Southwest, and he developed a new approach to recreational

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<sup>14</sup> Susan L. Flader, "Aldo Leopold and the Evolution of a Land Ethic," in Thomas Tanner, ed., *Aldo Leopold: The Man and His Legacy* (Ankeny, IA: Soil Conservation Society of America, 1987), 2-24.

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policy, the designation of roadless wilderness areas that would come to have a major impact on natural resource policy nationwide. He published the first-ever article on the topic, "The Wilderness and its Place in Forest Recreational Policy," in the *Journal of Forestry* in 1921. Then, as part of his inspection of the Gila National Forest in 1922, he prepared a proposal for designation of some 750,000 acres as a Gila Wilderness Area, drawing boundaries that indicated the "limit of automobile accessibility" and recommending that the unimproved area within the boundary remain untouched by any roads or other construction.<sup>15</sup> In 1924 the Gila National Forest received the first national wilderness area designation. During the next few years, he published a series of articles in major national publications making the case for a system of wilderness areas on public lands nationwide and sparking a national debate over what became known as "the wilderness idea."<sup>16</sup>

When the Gila was officially designated as wilderness, Leopold was already en route to a new position, as assistant director of the Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin, then the principal research arm of the Forest Service. In addition to research on forest products, Leopold encouraged research on cooperation between national forests and timber companies, uses of less popular species, sizes and grades of wood, and general reduction of wood waste. Although he became involved during his off-hours in conservation policy issues in Wisconsin with new colleagues in the Izaak Walton League, and the whole family took up an interest in archery, complete with handmade bows and arrows, Leopold was not entirely happy at the lab. In 1928 he resigned from the Forest Service to help shape a profession not yet born, game management.

### The Roots of Game Management

Among job offers that came Leopold's way when he let it be known he would leave the lab was an opportunity to lead a national survey of game conditions, funded by the Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturer's Institute (SAAMI), an industrial consortium interested in protecting their business through protection and restoration of game populations. Leopold, an avid hunter himself, was interested not solely in perpetuating the sport of hunting but also in investigating possible ways to change current ominous trends; the SAAMI expected Leopold to investigate game conservation efforts and to recommend and direct research projects. During his surveys of individual states, Leopold met with hundreds of people who could help him grasp trends in game populations, land use and habitat change—sportsmen, scientists, politicians, journalists, professors, conservation officers, and landowners, including farmers and other ordinary citizens. He began to give regional definition to the most important trend of the times, the intensification of agriculture and its impact on the elimination of fencerows, woodlots, wetlands and other essential wildlife habitat.<sup>17</sup>

It soon became clear that he would have to limit himself to a few states, so he focused on the eight north central states from Ohio to Missouri to Minnesota. He was also selected by colleagues at the annual American Game Conference in New York to chair a committee to draft a national game policy. Adopted in 1930, the policy signaled a new approach to wildlife conservation in the United States, in that it emphasized not game laws or artificial propagation but production in the wild by the landholder, whether public or private.<sup>18</sup> This policy spearheaded by Leopold would remain the wildlife profession's guiding statement for forty-three years until a revised policy, adopted in 1973, took effect. Meanwhile, Leopold completed and published his *Report on a Game Survey of the North Central States* (1931), which established him as the most informed game authority in

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<sup>15</sup> Meine, *Aldo Leopold*, 200-201.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 262-263.

<sup>18</sup> Susan L. Flader, *Thinking Like a Mountain: Aldo Leopold and the Evolution of an Ecological Attitude Toward Deer, Wolves, and Forests* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974), 22.

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the nation.<sup>19</sup>

The country by this time had entered the Great Depression, and SAAMI could no longer fund Leopold; with a wife and five children to support, he was unemployed. He found a few jobs as a consulting forester. This work included an extensive survey of Iowa for a twenty-five year conservation plan, and a return to the Southwest in 1933 to supervise erosion control work in CCC camps—in conjunction with which he delivered perhaps the most important address of his career, “The Conservation Ethic.” But most of his time he devoted to writing another book, *Game Management* (Scribner’s, 1933), which remained the standard text for the new field for decades and is still in print as a conservation classic.

### Life as a Professor

In summer 1933 the University of Wisconsin established the nation’s first chair in game management for Leopold; it was lodged in the Department of Agricultural Economics in anticipation of his work to develop alternative game crops for some of Wisconsin’s exhausted or tax-delinquent agricultural lands. The sand counties were a case in point, and, even before his university appointment, he had proposed a Central Wisconsin Foundation to “pioneer beyond the usual and familiar categories of land use.” But having just experienced a depression-era conservation planning process in Iowa that utilized imported experts like himself who would have no involvement in its implementation, Leopold intended to build from the ground up in Wisconsin, involving ordinary farmers and other local citizens. He began immediately to help shape a path-breaking effort in the severely eroded Coon Valley watershed in southwestern Wisconsin, where university and federal agency specialists in a variety of fields worked with more than three hundred farm families to develop an integrated multi-faceted program of land restoration. “An Adventure in Cooperative Conservation” he called it in an article describing the effort, which has been recognized nationally as the first demonstration project of the new Soil Erosion Service.

The Coon Valley project, on which Leopold’s sons Starker and Luna also worked, set the pattern for many of his subsequent efforts, in which he typically assigned his graduate students to field areas where they would live and work with groups of farmers on particular research and management efforts. Closer to home, he was also involved in creating the management plan for a new five hundred acre university arboretum, which was not just a collection of trees from afar but, under his guidance, would become dedicated to restoring “a sample of original Wisconsin” -- the characteristic landscapes and ecological communities of the state. A half-century later, the University of Wisconsin Arboretum would be recognized as the national leader of the new ecological restoration movement.

Leopold’s philosophical shift toward ecology and the ecological approach to wildlife conservation during the 1930s differed from his early views in the Southwest, when he had sought to produce maximum huntable game such as deer and turkeys, eliminating predatory wolves and mountain lions in the process. He had been most successful in the Gila National Forest, but after he had left the Southwest the deer multiplied in the absence of predators and caused so much damage that the Forest Service in 1931 had to drive a road through the Gila Wilderness, over Leopold’s strong objection, in order to give hunters access to the top-heavy herd. His new approach was crystallized by several experiences in 1935. In January, he joined with Robert Marshall, Benton MacKaye, Robert Sterling Yard, Ernest Oberholtzer and others to found the Wilderness Society, advising that the new society should include those interested in wilderness for ecological studies as well as for esthetic and social purposes. And that summer, shortly after purchasing his sand county farm, he was offered a fellowship to study forestry and game management in Germany, his first and only trip abroad. As Dr. Flader writes, “His

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<sup>19</sup> Meine, *Aldo Leopold*, 278-279.

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confrontation with the ecological and esthetic costs of the highly artificialized German system of management, particularly with respect to deer and forests, challenged some of his most basic assumptions about the possibility of environmental control and led him to reevaluate the objectives of wildlife management.”<sup>20</sup>

More than ever before, he appreciated the need to restore biotic diversity in order to create the conditions for a naturally functioning system. On his return home, he published an article on “Threatened Species” in which he called explicitly for the preservation and restoration of rare and endangered native species, including wolves, grizzlies and other predators he had once sought to eliminate in the interests of more shootable game. This transformation in his thinking was brought full circle during two hunting trips to the Rio Gavilan in the Sierra Madre of northern Mexico in 1936 and 1937. Here was a place that still retained the stability of its soils, the clarity of its waters, and the integrity of its flora and fauna despite periodic wildfire, and deer thrived in the midst of their natural enemies, wolves and mountain lions. As Leopold put it in an unpublished forward to “Great Possessions” (the manuscript that became *A Sand County Almanac*): “It was here that I first clearly realized that land is an organism, that all my life I had seen only sick land, whereas here was a biota still in perfect aboriginal health. The term ‘unspoiled wilderness’ took on a whole new meaning.”<sup>21</sup> Even the Gila Wilderness, he now realized, was sick land. The vital new idea for Leopold was the concept of biotic or land health. Henceforth, the objective of management, in his view, would be to restore the health of the biotic community.

### The Sand County Farm

During the very years that Leopold was undergoing this profound transformation in his thought about the objectives of management and the purposes of conservation, he was also working out his philosophy on the ground at the sand county farm he purchased in 1935. It was here that he began to experience firsthand the imponderables of even the best-intentioned management, here that he learned a profound humility in his use of the manager’s tools, here that he participated directly in the life of the land community as “plain member and citizen.”

He had been looking on and off for a decade for a hunting camp near home, and the state’s first bow-and-arrow deer season in fall 1934 rekindled his yen. He first leased the abandoned farm in January 1935 and then purchased it in April. The only building was a manure-filled chicken coop-turned-cowshed that would serve for lodging. The family fondly began to refer to it, and to the property as a whole, as the shack, and once it was theirs its role as a hunting camp receded as they began to work on restoring the land to ecological integrity.

Leopold, his wife Estella, and their five children rehabilitated the shack as a weekend retreat where they had only the essentials needed to live lightly on the land. Restoration of the natural environment and observation of its daily and seasonal changes would provide entertainment aplenty, supplemented by guitars and song around the fire in the evening. Absent modern conveniences their work on the shack and the surrounding landscape gave them spiritual grounding and a profound family bond. The years spent stabilizing and restoring the land and observing its life would provide inspiration for Leopold’s maturing concepts of land health, conservation esthetics and a land ethic, and for his *Sand County Almanac* and other essays and scientific papers on wildlife and conservation.

During shack weekends, Leopold rose early to experience the waking of his property. These solitary moments

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<sup>20</sup> Flader, *Thinking Like a Mountain*, 30.

<sup>21</sup> Aldo Leopold, “Foreword,” in J. Baird Callicott, ed., *Companion to A Sand County Almanac: Interpretive and Critical Essays* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987).

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of observation and reflection provided grist for some of the essays in *A Sand County Almanac*, most notably “Great Possessions” (Leopold’s title essay for the book as submitted to Oxford University Press), and for several scientific papers, including a major paper, “Avian Daybreak and Evening Song in Relation to Time and Light Intensity,” published in *The Condor* in 1961 by Alfred Eynon and based on Leopold’s field data and unpublished manuscripts.

Leopold and his family tracked animals, banded birds, and kept detailed phenological records of seasonal events, painstakingly recording the first and last blooms of trees and flowers, the arrivals and departures of migratory birds, and other dateable events in the annual cycle. The first essay in the *Almanac*, “January Thaw,” is a beautiful evocation of these tracking and phenological observations; its opening paragraph is also the opening paragraph of “A Phenological Record for Sauk and Dane Counties, Wisconsin, 1935-1945,” which Leopold published in *Ecological Monographs* in 1947 after he was elected president of the Ecological Society of America, the most august scientific honor ever bestowed on this conservationist who never earned a Ph.D. The *Almanac* also references the time-honored ritual of banding and counting chickadees, most notably chickadee number 65290, who was captured and recorded for five years, setting a record for his species.

Most important, the farm provided space enough and time to practice the art of husbandry, a component of the recreational or esthetic experience that Leopold regarded as even more profound or highly evolved than ecological perception, as he explained in “Conservation Esthetic.” Beginning with his acquisition of the property, Leopold began keeping a separate journal for shack visits. Running to three volumes totaling some 2,000 pages, the journals record an almost exponential increase in detail about specific plantings and transplantings, projects in, on or around the shack, wildlife populations, and overall changes to the land. From April to October, scarcely a day went by that someone in the family did not plant or transplant something. In the early years, ninety-five, to ninety-nine percent of seedlings were killed by drought. Even after they began to take hold, they could be choked by weeds or grasses, clipped by rabbits or deer, drowned by floods, scorched by fire, or attacked by rust or weevils or vandals. The winter months were for the axe and saw, and here Leopold was forced to think even harder about his decisions, perhaps because of their finality, as he explained in “Axe-in-Hand.”

Leopold’s own decisive participation in the life of the land engendered in him a profound humility as he pondered the obvious subjectivity of his decisions and the often inscrutable factors involved in life and death, growth and decay. “Conservation,” he concluded, “is a matter of what a man thinks about while chopping, or while deciding what to chop. A conservationist is one who is humbly aware that with each stroke he is writing his signature on the face of his land.” Susan Flader explains that Leopold’s sand county farm was a starting point to which he returned again and again in his search for what he called “a durable scale of values,” a land ethic: “At the shack, through his unique capacity for perception and husbandry, he became a participant in the drama of the land’s workings, and he transformed the land as it transformed him.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Aldo Leopold, “Axe-in-Hand,” *A Sand County Almanac*, 68; Flader, *The Sand Country of Aldo Leopold*, 47.

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Leopold's Growing Influence

Publication of *A Sand County Almanac* did not occur until after Leopold's unexpected death in 1948 although the manuscript had been accepted for publication two weeks prior. The book was favorably reviewed and began a period of modest but steady sales that increased exponentially after it was released by Ballentine in a mass-market paperback edition in 1970, a period of a national environmental awakening associated with the first Earth Day. Since then it has sold well over two million copies in several different editions, not including copies of translated versions in nine different languages. More than half the distinguished scientists, humanists, and environmental leaders asked in 1973 to suggest titles for an "Environmental Books Hall of Fame," nominated a *Sand County Almanac* and it easily outdistanced its nearest rivals, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*.

Leopold was honored by the U.S. Forest Service in 1974 on the fiftieth anniversary of the Gila Wilderness, and he was repeatedly invoked as the father of the national wilderness system by advocates for congressionally designated wilderness during the long debates leading to passage in 1964 of the Wilderness Act, though the USFS and many foresters opposed the act. His popularity among college students and other environmentalists increased in the 1970s at a time when the Forest Service and the forestry profession in general faced increased criticism, especially over the practice of clear-cutting. Leopold's ideas enjoyed greater receptivity in the National Park Service, especially after his son Starker's celebrated 1963 report on "Wildlife Management in the National Parks."

In the late 1970s Leopold's ideas and writing, especially *A Sand County Almanac*, helped inspire the new fields of environmental history and environmental ethics; Leopold regularly appears as a key player in histories of the environmental movement, and philosophers on several continents debate his ethical and esthetic ideas. In the early 1980s, as political debate about the environment began to polarize, Leopold continued to inspire people across the ideological spectrum, from corporate executives, ranchers and other landowners concerned about their land-management prerogatives to ecologists and Earth First advocates. His ideas about property, both private and public, are regularly discussed in law review articles and journals of public policy, and his ideas about economics appear prominently in discussions of ecological and environmental economics.

Leaders of the new fields of conservation biology and restoration ecology in the 1980s traced their founding ideas to Leopold's pioneering efforts at land restoration at the University of Wisconsin Arboretum and at his sand county farm. Inspired by his many articles about farming and conservation, the Center for Sustainable Agriculture established at Iowa State University through passage of the Iowa Groundwater Protection Act of 1987, was named for Aldo Leopold. Leopold's ideas began to penetrate forestry schools and the ranks of younger forestry professionals, and led in 1989, to the establishment of an Association of Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics and a protracted process within the Society of American Foresters to develop a land ethic canon. In 1992, the chief of the Forest Service announced a new management philosophy, ecosystem management, to guide the service into the twenty-first century. Specifically referencing only Leopold in the USFS 2005 centennial film "The Greatest Good" juxtaposed Pinchot's course for the twentieth century with Leopold's for the twenty-first.

The St. Paul-based Leopold Education Project, which uses *A Sand County Almanac* to teach about humanity's ties to the natural environment, claims a national network of some 10,000 teachers trained in the use of its materials, while the Aldo Leopold Leadership Program, headquartered at Stanford University, has trained hundreds of scientists for more effective roles in the public arena. The Friends of Scenic Lodi Valley began a program, Lodi Reads Leopold, to read the *Almanac* aloud the first weekend each March, a program that has spread to numerous communities in Wisconsin and other states. In China, Leopold's essay "The Geese Return"

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(in Chinese translation) is included in the national middle school textbook of language and literature, where it may now be read by virtually every middle school student in the nation.

Probably most important is the inspiration Leopold's concept of land health and his community-based land ethic offers to the burgeoning movement for community-based conservation, from ranching groups like the Quivira Coalition and the Malpais Borderlands Group in New Mexico, to the Chicago Wilderness coalition of more than a hundred organizations engaged in restoration of urban environs, to thousands of watershed partnerships throughout the nation, to groups devoted to farmer's markets, slow food, urban health, environmental justice, energy efficiency, and green building. One of the largest gatherings of such groups was the 2005 White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation, at which Leopold was invoked by virtually every plenary speaker and in many of the workshops as well.

### Comparative Analysis

Many individuals influenced the conservation movement and several notable properties have received designation as National Historic Landmarks. Evaluation of the national significance of the Aldo Leopold Shack and Farm requires comparison with other properties associated with Aldo Leopold and with other conservation-related National Historic Landmarks currently designated.

### Leopold Properties

All of the major homes in which Aldo Leopold lived are still extant, but, except for the shack, all are privately owned and no longer in the family. His two childhood homes next to each other in Burlington, Iowa, are part of the Starker-Leopold Historic District in Burlington, which was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983. The significance of the property relates to the role of Leopold's grandparents, parents and siblings in the history of Burlington for more than a century. While Leopold learned to appreciate the land growing up in this area, these houses do not represent the full development of his conservation ethic.

The house built for Leopold and his new wife, officially as a Forest Service office on the Carson National Forest in Tres Piedras, New Mexico, has long been locally associated with its first occupants, but they lived there only half a year until Leopold's illness. In view of its association with Leopold, the Forest Service has recently rehabilitated it (probably not fully to standard for a historical restoration) but apparently has not yet determined its use.

The Leopold home on South 14<sup>th</sup> Street in Albuquerque, in which the family lived from 1916-1924, is historically important chiefly for Leopold's role in the history of Albuquerque and his career as a USFS Southwestern District official.

The Leopold home on Van Hise Street in Madison, Wisconsin, in which he and his family lived from 1924 until his death in 1948, remained in the family until his wife's death in 1975. It is significant as the home of a distinguished scientific family, but it does not have as close a connection as his farm does to the development of his conservation thought, practice, and writing.

### Properties Associated with Conservation

The most notable figures involved in the field of conservation which have properties listed as National Historic Landmarks, are discussed below. Each had a philosophy distinct from Aldo Leopold's in that their approaches related to their own personal beliefs, influences and historical circumstances. While each of these individuals

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greatly influenced our modern thought, policies, and attitudes toward nature, the Leopold property is worthy of designation on its own merit, associated with but distinct from these others.

*Walden Pond*

Henry David Thoreau (1817- 1862) lived in a simple one-room cabin on the shore of the 65-acre lake known as Walden Pond from 1845-1847. As a poet, philosopher, and nature writer, Thoreau wrote of his quest for the “great focus of his existence” and developed his philosophy of man’s relationship to nature. Thoreau published his internationally known *Walden, or Life in the Woods*, in 1854, based on his experience at Walden Pond. Thoreau is highly regarded today as an American literary figure.

Walden Pond near Concord, Massachusetts, was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1962, but it faces pressures from urban encroachment, which impact the integrity of the property. The National Historic Landmark nomination includes the property and the pond, but there are no contributing buildings. Archeology, completed in the 1940s, determined the location of the cabin.

*Fountain Lake Farm (Wisconsin Farm Home of John Muir)*

John Muir (1838-1914), regarded by some as one of the founding fathers of the national parks, was an important literary figure and advocate for natural resource preservation in the United States. As a founding member and president of the Sierra Club and widely published author, he had significant influence on the preservation of natural areas and on modern environmental philosophies.

Fountain Lake Farm, designated a National Historic Landmark in 1990 and located in Montello, Wisconsin, remains an open environment without extant buildings. A natural meadow, lake, and spring make up the property. New construction surrounding the property creates a negative impact on the integrity of the site.

*John Muir House*

The John Muir House in Martinez, California, was Muir’s home during the period of his major contributions to the forest conservation movement. Muir founded the Sierra Club and has been referred to as a founder of the National Park Service. Now part of the John Muir National Historic Site the property was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1962. The property is in good condition and is well-maintained by the National Park Service.

*Rachel Carson House*

Rachel Carson (1907-1964), best known for her book, *Silent Spring* (1962), changed the way Americans think about chemical pesticides and herbicides and our natural environment. Carson’s literary ability and status as a scientist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service bolstered her achievement to propose legislation that eliminated the twelve most toxic agents described in her book. Designated a National Historic Landmark in 1991, Rachel Carson’s House is located in Silver Spring, Maryland. The landmark is in good condition.

*Murie Ranch Historic District*

The Murie Family, especially Olaus, Adolph, and Margaret (Mardy), changed the way the federal government and scientific community study and manage natural lands and their wildlife populations. Contemporaries of Aldo Leopold, the Muries studied human interactions with the biotic community; they placed a strong emphasis on the establishment of national wilderness areas, and influenced the creation of the Arctic National Wildlife

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Refuge. Designated a National Historic Landmark in 2006, the Murie Ranch Historic District, located in Moose, Wyoming, is in good condition and includes twenty-six contributing resources on 73.16 acres.

Conclusion

The Aldo Leopold Farm is nationally significant because of its association with Aldo Leopold and his contributions to the fields of conservation, game management, and wildlife ecology. Owned, operated, and managed by the Aldo Leopold Foundation, the farm property with its contributing buildings and site, remains in much the same condition and appearance as it did during Aldo Leopold's ownership, possessing a very high degree of historic integrity.

Leopold's conservation philosophy matured as he engaged in restoring his sand county farm following years of human abuse. In developing his land ethic philosophy grounded in love and respect for the land community along with a conviction of individual responsibility in maintaining and restoring its health, and beautifully articulating it in *A Sand County Almanac* and numerous other scientific and literary publications, Leopold fueled modern environmental philosophy, policy, and management. The growing national and international recognition of Leopold's contributions to conservation is epitomized by his sand county farm in Wisconsin.