Aldo Leopold
and Environmental Citizenship

In the outpouring of books and articles in recent years on the meaning of citizenship, many of them lamenting the weakening of civic bonds in America, there has been scant attention to the role of citizenship with respect to the environment. Even among environmentalists, who realize that citizen action has been a hallmark of the “new environmental movement” from the time of the first Earth Day (1970), there is little appreciation of the extent to which our citizenry has played a vital role in the shaping of American environmental policy ever since the origins of the nation.

As we seek the historical roots of our quest for environmental quality and the means for sustaining it, it is worth pondering the roles and responsibilities of citizens and the relationship between the citizenry and the state—in short, how American democracy works. In this exploration, we may seek insights from Aldo Leopold, who was profoundly conscious of the American democratic tradition within which he was working and who thought hard throughout his career about the meanings and implications of environmental citizenship.

We have had in the United States a tradition of a limited or weak state. It may not seem that way today when people complain of a bloated federal bureaucracy, but relative to the strong central states in the democracies of Western Europe and certainly to authoritarian regimes, our government is decidedly limited and our citizens have always had a healthy skepticism about most everything that government tries to do. In this weak state we have traditionally had rather low legal expectations of our citizens. Citizens are expected to obey the law and pay taxes; even voting is optional. Yet we have had in America a concomitantly vibrant tradition of voluntary citizen action.

The foremost interpreter of the era of the American Revolution, Gordon Wood, has termed the phenomenon of
revolutionary citizen action “the people out of doors.” He was likely not thinking environmentally, but rather portraying “people out of doors” as citizens acting voluntarily outside of the formal channels of government to shape the kind of community they wanted. When we look back at the controversies of the era, however, we see citizens acting often on environmental issues. Local groups organized, with some success, to prevent new dams from blocking the passage of salmon upstream, for example, seeking to protect their community’s customary right to fish against interference by new industrial mills.

When we think of the origins of the nation, we tend to think of citizens struggling for liberty, for the right of the individual to pursue his own self-interest. This is a concept of American history that became cemented in our imaginations especially during the Cold War, when we were fighting the menace of international Communism and trying to picture America as everything that the Soviet Union was not. Yet, historians returning to the original documents of the revolutionary era several decades ago began to see in them some ideas that were at first startling, because they were so at odds with the usual interpretation. What they found were people who thought of themselves as citizens of a republic in which the greatest virtue was civic consciousness, a willingness to subordinate one’s own self-interest to the good of the community. “Civic virtue,” they called it, or “civic republicanism,” referring to the participatory civic values of a republic like that of ancient Athens. We tend to celebrate America as a country grounded in individual rights, like the freedoms of speech and of the press and of assembly enshrined in the first article of the Bill of Rights. But a case can be made that these rights pertain to communities as well as to individuals; they protect the opportunity for ordinary citizens to organize and communicate with each other outside of the formal channels of government to shape the environment of their communities or the policies of their governments.

The complex of republican values so pervasive in revolutionary America was largely overwhelmed, scholars are agreed, by democratic egalitarianism, liberal individualism, and capitalist development in the early nineteenth century, ushering in the liberal democratic state we celebrate today. But the tradition of civic organizing has persisted in American history. It has not been mandated by law; it has been voluntary. The tendency of Americans to form voluntary groups—“associations,” Alexis de Tocqueville called them—could be used to sustain traditional community values; it could also be used to protect economic self-interest. This tradition of citizen action, especially in its “civic republican” strain, is the tradition out of which much of our American conservation movement grew. But it may also be the tradition from which several strands of what we may think of today as anti-environmentalism emerged—groups devoted to “wise use,” property rights, and county supremacy. Citizens organize for a variety of purposes.

It must be noted that not everyone regards voluntary citizen action as key to the shaping of society or environmental policy. Many would argue that ours is a representative democracy and that the shaping and administration of policy is the responsibility of elected representatives and executive agencies. Indeed, much of the administrative capacity of the modern American state was developed in the Progressive Era at the turn of the twentieth century, in large part in response to environmental concerns. The U.S. Forest Service, in which Aldo Leopold
began his career, has been regarded by scholars as the quintessential example of a progressive agency. Gifford Pinchot, the first chief of the Forest Service, sought to place technically trained experts—professional foresters like Leopold—in government and let them establish specific policies and manage the resources. This was a model of governance that elevated the values of order, efficiency, and control—values that may be quite incompatible with democratic participation. Pinchot once said, “The first duty of the human race is to control the earth it lives upon,” and I think Leopold himself once may have believed that. From the perspective of a later day, however, we may note that the progressive model, in elevating the virtues of professionalism and technical expertise, tended to crowd out the citizenry and also their elected representatives, the politicians.

Inasmuch as Aldo Leopold began his career as a professional in the employ of the modern administrative state and is today regarded as something of a prophet of the new environmental consciousness, which elevates the responsibilities of citizenship, we may look to him for insights into the meanings of environmental citizenship—into the role of citizens in the modern state, the tension between the rights of individuals and the claims of the community, and the tension also between professional resource managers and citizen activists. We look first at what Leopold had to say about citizenship in *A Sand County Almanac*, the slender volume of nature sketches and philosophical essays that represents the distillation of his mature thought, and then explore the evolution of his thinking during the course of his career.

As we page through *A Sand County Almanac*, we meet our first citizen in the very first essay, “January Thaw”:

The mouse is a sober citizen who knows that grass grows in order that mice may store it as underground haystacks, and that snow falls in order that mice may build subways from stack to stack: supply, demand, and transport all neatly organized.

The mouse is what kind of citizen?—an ordinary citizen who goes about his own business and pursues his own interests. We have many such in our communities.

Skipping perhaps a few citizens, we come to “Pines Above the Snow”: “Each species of pine,” Leopold tells us, “has its own constitution, which prescribes a term of office for needles appropriate to its way of life.” He continues with his analogy between human constitutions and the regimen of various pine trees, the white pine retaining its needles for a year and a half, red and jackpines for two and a half years, “Incoming needles take office in June, and outgoing needles write farewell addresses in October.” These pines are going about their own business, but they are also meeting the legal requirements of citizenship, acting according to their constitutions, even taking office in a perfunctory way.

Next we meet the thick-billed parrots of Chihuahua, who “wheel and spiral, loudly debating with each other the question . . . whether this new day which creeps slowly over the canyons is bluer and golder than its predecessors, or less so.” They are debating the criteria of the good life, which in Aristotelian thought is an activity of citizenship more fundamental even than that of developing legal constitutions. The vote being a draw, Leopold observes, they head to the high mesas for breakfast.

In “Clandeboye,” the great prairie marsh of Manitoba, we find the grebe, a species of ancient evolutionary lineage impelled, Leopold believes, by “pride of continuity.”
His is the call that dominates and unifies the marshland chorus: “Perhaps, by some immemorial authority, he wields the baton for the whole biota.”14 Here is the grebe as ethical citizen, as a leader directing the chorus of the marsh for the longterm betterment of the whole community.

Not until the more philosophical essays in the last section of the book do we meet human citizens. In “Conservation Esthetic” Leopold discusses the various components of the recreational process, beginning with the most basic motivation of trophy seeking, common to hunters with both shotgun and field glass as well as to most conservationists and even professionals. He goes on to discuss other more highly evolved components of the recreational process, such as a feeling of isolation in nature or the perception of natural processes, and then reaches what to him is the ultimate component, a sense of husbandry. This component, he tells us, “is unknown to the outdoorsman who works for conservation with his vote rather than with his hands. It is realized only when some art of management is applied to land by some person of perception.”15 So, to Leopold, husbandry is the highest form of citizenship: actually working with one’s hands, participating actively to build or maintain the land community.

Leopold expresses his concept of environmental citizenship most memorably in “The Land Ethic”:

In short, a land ethic changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such.16

Here Leopold offers us a concept of citizenship in a community larger even than humankind; we are plain member and citizen of the land and all the plants and animals that are a part of it. The usual formula for conservation, “Obey the law, vote right, join some organizations, and practice what conservation is profitable on your own land; the government will do the rest,” he tells us is too easy. “It defines no right and wrong, assigns no obligation.”17 Leopold’s formula implies personal responsibility to participate actively as an ordinary citizen in maintaining or restoring the health of the biotic community.

This review of A Sand County Almanac suggests that Leopold’s mature concept of environmental citizenship, with its emphasis on obligation to the community, is similar in some respects to the concept of civic virtue in the republican ideology of the American Revolution, though he conceives the community much more broadly. But one would not necessarily expect to find these ideas early in his career, when he was working for the U. S. Forest Service, modeled on a different conception of the relationship between citizens and the state.

Aldo Leopold throughout his career was a consummate professional, extremely efficiency-oriented during his years in the Forest Service and fascinated by the intricacies of administrative procedures and standards.18 And yet we get a sense from one of his earliest publications that he was not wholly satisfied with the Forest Service model of governmental administration. Shortly after he had become supervisor of the Carson National Forest in New Mexico at age 25, he was stricken with an illness that nearly led to his death and required more than a year of recuperation. During this time he addressed a letter “to the forest officers of the Carson” reflecting on their responsibilities. The problem that concerned him was how to measure success in forest administration. Was success simply a matter of efficiently
following prescribed policies and procedures, or was there something else? “My measure,” Leopold wrote, “is the effect on the forest.” Even at the start of his career he was concerned about the ends of administration, what was happening to the land, not only the procedures, or means.\textsuperscript{19}

It was a preoccupation he would continue to pursue into the early 1920s, when he was chief of operations in charge of roads, trails, fire control, personnel, and finance on twenty million acres of national forests in the Southwest. In order to improve the efficiency of administration while focussing attention on “the effect on the forest,” he developed an intricate system of tally sheets for a new system of forest inspection that would enable foresters to diagnose local problems and monitor the effectiveness of management solutions. Leopold regarded this elaborate system of inspection as one of his points of greatest pride during his career in the Southwest. And indeed, his lifelong fascination with tracking the dynamics of change and the efficacy of management for the total biotic system, begun during his inspection forays in the Southwest, would lead him in our own day to be acknowledged as the exemplar of the new philosophy of ecosystem management recently adopted by the Forest Service and other land management agencies.\textsuperscript{20}

Clearly, Leopold was enlarging the responsibilities of professional foresters by extending the boundaries of the community of concern to include the entire biota—soils, waters, plants, and animals—as well as trees and the economic interests of the people who used them. But there was scant room for ordinary citizens in Leopold’s model of forest administration. Though he recognized the difficulty of determining the objectives of management—a problem that bedevils ecosystem management today—he concluded that these decisions should be made by “only the highest authority.”\textsuperscript{21} Yet the essay in which he dealt most directly with what he called “standards of conservation” tails off in mid-sentence and remained unpublished, suggesting that Leopold may have realized he was caught in an unresolved problem of authority: who decides the objectives and on what basis? A kind of ‘super-inspector’ would crop up in his writing from time to time over the years, but I am not sure he was ever really comfortable with this type of authority.\textsuperscript{22}

Despite Leopold’s commitment to professional expertise in forest administration, he saw roles for citizens in related endeavors. Indeed, when his illness prevented him from resuming his post as a forest supervisor, he began developing a new line of activity—game management—in the Forest Service, and in conjunction with this he traveled all across Arizona and New Mexico organizing game protective associations—citizen conservation organizations—in local communities and statewide. These associations of sportsmen, ranchers, and townspeople would work for non-political game wardens, predator control, and refuges. They were grassroots citizen-action groups in a longstanding American tradition.

Leopold addressed the subject of citizenship in a number of lectures early in his career, including one on “Home Gardens and Citizenship” to students at the University of New Mexico in 1917, just after the American entry into World War I. A home garden, he said, was one mark of a useful citizen. Nobility is won by soiling your hands with useful labor, by building something. Leopold was always one for building something. If your job doesn’t allow enough play for creativity, he told the students, you can be creative by working the ground, whereupon he went into a solilo-
quy about how to raise spectacular tomatoes in your Albuquerque backyard. In a world threatened with food shortage, what right have we to hold idle some of the best agricultural lands in our back yards? he asked. Better to turn them into gardens and learn to be good citizens.23

A year later he spoke to the women’s club on “The Civic Life of Albuquerque.” Having left the Forest Service to become secretary of the Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce, Leopold was now asking “What has the 20th-century American city contributed to human progress?” His answer was public spirit. He defined it as “year-round patriotism in action; ... intelligent unselfishness in practice.” He tried to trace the idea historically, contrasting Confucius, whom he saw as more interested in personal virtues and family ties than in obligations to others, with Socrates, who knew that citizens had a moral obligation to support and improve their government. But then he lost the thread, explaining that it would require a better scholar than I am to even attempt to trace the idea of public spirit through the era of individualism and the political revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries.”24

From this we realize that the concept of civic virtue, the republican ideology of the American Revolution, had been lost to consciousness by 1918. Leopold was assuming a revolutionary America dedicated to individualism; he had lost the thread of public spirit, though he sensed it must have been there somewhere. And in fact historians would not rediscover it until the late 1960s, twenty years after his death. But he went on to define the “modern idea”—modern as of 1918—of public spirit: “It means that a democratic community and its citizens have certain reciprocal rights and obligations.” Not only rights, but obligations as well. “The man who cheerfully and habitually tries to meet this responsibility,” he says, “we call public-spirited.”

Leopold went on to offer a critical assessment of the public spirit of Albuquerque, confiding his dream that his own Chamber of Commerce might serve as the “common center” to organize the “democratic welter” of professional societies, women’s groups, religious, political, labor, and other voluntary associations of citizens toward accomplishment of common goals for the betterment of Albuquerque. But he also admitted to some frustration—businessmen unwilling to welcome representation in the chamber by labor and craft organizations, for example.

After little more than a year, Leopold left the Chamber of Commerce to rejoin the Forest Service. A few years later, still feeling the effects of his experience in the chamber, he delivered a scathing “Criticism of the Booster Spirit” to an Albuquerque civic society in which he excoriared “the philosophy of boost.” Boost was premised on growth by unearned increment, rather than investment in basic resources, especially the soil, he charged. In his quest for fundamental improvement in the resource base, he began looking to enforced responsibility of landowners. In “Pioneers and Gullies,” for example, he described numerous valleys of the Southwest torn out by erosion, and he predicted, for the first time in print, that one day proper land use would be a responsibility of citizens: “The day will come when the ownership of land will carry with it the obligation to so use and protect it with respect to erosion that it is not a menace to other landowners and the public.”25

Leopold left the Southwest in 1924 to accept a job in Madison, Wisconsin, as director of the Forest Products Laboratory. Though the laboratory’s focus on industrial products after the tree was cut proved ultimately frustrating for one so committed to
the growing forest and he would leave after only four years, he did manage to extract from the experience a lesson for citizens. In an article, “The Home Builder Conserves,” he admonished people, before they castigated the “wasteful lumberman,” to think about how their own arbitrary demands as consumers and home builders cause waste. The thinking citizen has power not only in his vote but in his daily thoughts and actions, and especially in his habits as a buyer and user of wood. “Good citizenship is the only effective patriotism,” he concluded, “and patriotism requires less and less of making the eagle scream, but more and more of making him think.” This theme of the responsibility of the citizen as intelligent consumer is one Leopold would return to from time to time, most notably during World War II in “Land Use and Democracy.”

Shortly after his move to Wisconsin, Leopold became involved with the state chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America, which was the most vibrant citizen conservation organization in the 1920s. He worked with the league to promote a non-partisan conservation commission and a forestry policy for Wisconsin. Still hewing to his professional orientation as a forester, however, he warned members to eschew the tendency to actually write policy: “It is a pretty safe rule to remember that while groups of men can insist on and criticize plans, only individuals can create them.”

Leopold himself was a professional writer of policies, as he demonstrated both in the Forest Service and after he left in 1928 to conduct game surveys and recommend conservation policies in the midwestern states, when he drafted an “American Game Policy” adopted by the American Game Conference in 1930, and when he helped write a “Twenty-Five Year Conservation Plan” for his home state of Iowa in 1931.

Leopold was tremendously impressed by the citizen commitment to conservation in Iowa and genuinely proud of the plan for integration of all aspects of conservation—parks, forests, wildlife, fish, water quality, soil conservation—that the team of nationally recognized experts wrote. Iowa was clearly a leader among the states in conservation thought and practice in these years. But buried in Leopold’s correspondence are intimations of foreboding. He warned his colleagues in Iowa that they needed to make a special effort to educate the public about what was in the plan, lest people buy into it without personally engaging with it. He was concerned especially about the protection-minded women so active in the parks movement who might become upset if they were suddenly to discover that the plan aimed to produce game to shoot. “There is grave danger,” he said, “that the conservationists will blow it up before they even understand what it is.”

In 1933, shortly after he accepted a newly created chair of game management at the University of Wisconsin, Leopold proposed to the dean of agriculture the development of a conservation plan for Wisconsin farms similar to the Iowa plan. The purpose, as in Iowa, would be to get all the government agencies working together to encourage farmers and other landowners to care for their lands in a more conservative way—or, as he put it, to “integrate economic with esthetic land use.” But the means would differ. In Iowa the plan was produced by imported experts who did not participate in its execution, an arrangement that clearly left Leopold uneasy, whereas in Wisconsin he proposed to “evolve” a plan “rather than to write one out-of-hand.”

Leopold’s emphasis on evolving a plan from the grassroots was prophetic—not only of the emerging emphasis on public involve-
ment in resource planning in our own day but of the situation in Iowa at the time. By 1935 the Iowa conservation plan disintegrated, at least in Leopold’s view. After Iowa merged all relevant agencies into a single department, as recommended in the twenty-five-year plan, the new Iowa Conservation Commission bypassed the man whom to Leopold was the obvious director, and most of Leopold’s friends in fish and game resigned or were fired. The issue apparently had to do with the Iowa commission’s insistence on an immediate showing of quick results by government through public works rather than, as Leopold and his colleagues preferred, a long-term emphasis on building a new conservation consciousness in the citizenry, especially among landowners.30

In the wake of the Iowa debacle, Leopold commented to a friend that the only state conservation effort to survive was in Michigan, “strangely enough, by a process of internal disharmony. I am tempted to draw the conclusion that complete unanimity within a state [such as in Iowa] is a symptom of approaching dissolution.”31 In other correspondence and articles in the 1930s he addressed the problem of factions within the conservation community, especially the shotguns versus the field glass hunters, arguing for tolerance, a capacity for self criticism, and an institutional structure within which factions could argue out their conflicts. “It is a question of applying the democratic process to conservation,” he concluded.32

Leopold’s thoughts on democracy and conservation were further stimulated by travel in Germany in 1935, where he observed an elaborate system of law, public administration, ethics, and customs that was “incredibly complete and internally harmonious.” Though he could observe no real distinction between the government, acting hierarchically from the top down, and popular acceptance from below, he recognized that the German system, with its strong central governmental authority, was “manifestly a surrender of individualism to the community.”33 While he could admire it in Germany (before he understood the connection with the Nazi movement), he knew that it wouldn’t work in America.

Leopold addressed the tension between the claims of the community and the rights of the individual in America in a number of essays in the 1930s in which he dealt with the role of government. How can we get conservation? he often asked. And his answer: we can legislate it, we can buy it, or we can build it. Government’s initial efforts at conservation had been through laws prohibiting hunting, fishing, or cutting, a first step but inadequate. The second step, augmented by the open money bags of the New Deal, was to buy land for conservation, but that could be carried only “as far as the tax string on our leg will reach.” The solution had to be found on private land.34

By the time he wrote “Land Pathology” under the menacing clouds of the dust bowl in 1935, he saw only two possible forces that could effect change in private land use. One was the development of institutional mechanisms for protecting the public interest in private land—a quest he had been on for over a decade, especially after his new chair of game management was lodged in the University of Wisconsin’s famed Department of Agricultural Economics with its institutional bent. The other was his new preoccupation with “the revival of land esthetics in rural culture.” Out of these forces he hoped might eventually emerge what he was even then beginning to term a “land ethic.”35 After his friend Jay “Ding” Darling cautioned him that his search for institutional controls could lead to socialization of property,
Leopold seemed increasingly to emphasize development of a personal sense of obligation to the land community, a sense of husbandry.

During these years of the depression Leopold experimented with a form of citizen organization he hoped would encourage a sense of husbandry. With farmers, sportsmen, and his own wildlife students he established a series of cooperative ventures intended to apply conservation to land and improve habitat for game. One of them, the Coon Valley Erosion Project near LaCrosse, Wisconsin, involved cooperation of local landowners with government agencies in a pathbreaking demonstration of erosion control and integrated land use on a watershed scale. But others functioned entirely outside the formal channels of government, including the Riley Cooperative and the Faville Grove Area within an easy drive of Madison. Leopold described these experiments in community conservation as vertical rather than horizontal planning, focusing a battery of minds simultaneously on one spot. “It may take a long time to cover the country spot by spot,” he admitted, “but that is preferable to a smear.”

As war clouds darkened the horizon and called into question his earlier admiration for Germany’s tightly regimented system of resource administration, Leopold lectured to his wildlife ecology students about “Ecology and Politics,” presenting the case for an evolutionary mandate for individualism. Individual deviations from societal norms in land management, like individual evolutionary variations, he suggested, might enable certain individuals to survive catastrophe even when most members of a species were eliminated. This was an individualism not of economic self-interest but of creative experimentation, in the sense of solutions generated from the bottom up by individual citizens or communities rather than mandated by government on all alike. It was in this spirit that Leopold looked to the evolution of a land ethic.

American entry into World War II further defined the issue: “We must prove that democracy can use its land decently,” Leopold argued in a seminal essay, “Land Use and Democracy.” Here he called for conservation from the bottom up instead of from the top down. It had to begin with “that combination of solicitude, foresight, and skill which we call husbandry,” practiced by landowners on their own land. But non-landowning citizens had responsibilities in their roles as consumers as well. They could refuse to buy “exploitation milk” from cows pastured on steep slopes and insist on “honest boards” from properly managed forests. There was an indispensable role for government as “tester of fact vs. fiction” or guardian of standards, Leopold acknowledged, but farmers could scrutinize their own practices through courageous use of their self-governing Soil Conservation Districts, and there were opportunities also for self-scrutiny by industrial or citizen groups. More than half a century later, the Forest Stewardship Council’s independent third-party certification of forest products and other examples of the movement for green production and consumption standards would attest to the validity of Leopold’s visionary argument.

Aldo Leopold’s ideas about the roles of government and citizens in the shaping of environmental policy were tested in the last decade of his life as never before by his involvement in the traumatic deer debates of the 1940s in Wisconsin. After being nearly hunted to extirpation in the early decades of the century, the state’s deer herd had increased to such an extent that by the early 1940s it needed to be reduced for the good of both deer and forest, and Leopold sought
to work with the Conservation Department to build a case for an "any-deer" season, for killing does as well as bucks. But the call for reduction stirred disbelief and resentment among both hunters and the general public, to whom conservation of deer was a good thing. In response, the Conservation Commission organized a Citizens' Deer Committee, appointing Aldo Leopold as chairman.  

Leopold’s committee had a cross-section of citizens, mostly from northern Wisconsin, most of them distrustful of the policy he was urging on the department. For the first meeting he prepared maps and charts to provide an historical review of deer irruptions nationwide. But he was upstaged by another member of the committee, Joyce Larkin, editor of the Vilas County News Review. She didn’t think there were too many deer, and she arrived at the meeting armed with a printed booklet of history and local opinion about the deer situation in Vilas County. We don’t know how Leopold reacted to Larkin that day, but we do know that he decided to take the committee and several newspaper reporters on a three-day tour of deer yards, to let them discuss what they were actually seeing on the ground. Joyce Larkin, among others, was impressed. She went back to Vilas, got the county board to accept Leopold’s challenge to bring clashing interests together to look at the problems locally, and came to a subsequent meeting of the committee with a new report in favor of an any-deer season.  

However successful Leopold proved at changing attitudes among the members of his Citizens’ Deer Committee by letting them argue out their views with respect to conditions in particular locales, the deer problem proved too widespread and public attitudes too entrenched for him to make much headway in the state as a whole. A new newspaper, Save Wisconsin’s Deer, ridiculed and castigated him in virtually every issue and offered fuel to those who opposed his reasoning. Yet he never gave up on his effort to educate the citizenry, individually and collectively. It is likely that the unremitting stress of dealing with the deer issue in the public arena during the 1940s helped send Leopold to an early grave. But he had been appointed to a six-year term on the Wisconsin Conservation Commission, and he believed it was his responsibility as a citizen to serve.  

During those years he took solace in the exercise of another type of citizenship that he had advocated since the days of his backyard garden in Albuquerque: he practiced husbandry as plain member and citizen of the land community at the sand farm his family called "the shack." He expressed this form of citizenship—citizenship as creative individualism—perhaps most poignantly in his essay, "Axe-in-Hand," which includes a definition of a conservationist that could as easily be read as his definition of a citizen:

I have read many definitions of what is a conservationist [citizen], and written not a few myself, but I suspect that the best one is written not with a pen, but with an axe. It is a matter of what a man thinks about while chopping, or while deciding what to chop. A conservationist [citizen] is one who is humbly aware that with each stroke he is writing his signature on the face of his land. Signatures of course differ, whether written with axe or pen, and this is as it should be.  

Endnotes

1 See A Nation of Spectators: How Civic Disengagement Weakens America and What We Can Do About It (Final Report of the National Commission on Civic Renewal, 1998); and Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America’s


12Ibid., 87.

13Ibid., 138.

14Ibid., 161.

15Ibid., 166–67, 175.

16Ibid., 204.
Ibid., 207–8.


“Standards of Conservation” (handwritten ms., c. 1922), General Files—Aldo Leopold, Series 9/25/10-6, Box 16, University of Wisconsin Division of Archives [hereafter cited as LP 6B6 (Leopold Papers, Series 6, Box 16)], reprinted in River, 82–85.


“A Criticism of the Booster Spirit,” 6 November 1923, 10pp tps speech to Ten Dons, LP 6B16, reprinted in River, 98–105; “Pioneers and Gullies,” Sunset Magazine 52:5 (May 1924), 15–16 and 91–95, reprinted in River, 106–13. Leopold’s language on the obligation of landowners was similar to that in a speech he had written in December 1922 for the New Mexico Association for Science, “Erosion as a Menace to the Social and Economic Future of the Southwest.” The speech was published many years later in Journal of Forestry 44:9 (Sept 1946), 627–33.


Leopold to Claude V. Campbell, 15 October 1932, LP 3B5, and associated correspondence. See also Jacob L. Crane, Jr., and George Wheeler Olcott, Report on the Iowa Twenty-Five Year Conservation Plan (Des Moines: Meredith, 1933).


“A House Divided,” Wisconsin Sportsman (October 1940), 5. See also “Game and Wild Life Conservation,” The Condor 34:2 (Mar-Apr...


36J. N. Darling to Leopold, 20 November 1935, LP 6B16.


41Ibid., 183–93.

42Ibid., 194.

43*A Sand County Almanac*, 68.

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