

The Leopold OUTLOOK

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THE ALDO
LEOPOLD
FOUNDATION

The privilege of possessing the earth entails the responsibility of passing it on, the better for our use, not only to immediate posterity, but to the Unknown Future.

Aldo Leopold

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Acts of conservation without the requisite desires and skills are futile. To create these desires and skills, and the community motive, is the task of education.

Aldo Leopold, "Conservation: In Whole or in Part?" (1944)

Quality equipment makes the Aldo Leopold Foundation's Fellows Program run! Thank you to our equipment partners:



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LAND ETHIC PRESS
The Aldo Leopold Foundation

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Moving Mountains

To change ideas about what land is for is to change ideas about what anything is for. Thus we started to move a straw, and end up with the job of moving a mountain.

Aldo Leopold, "State of the Profession" (1940)

ALDO LEOPOLD UNDERSTOOD that conservation was not an undertaking for the faint of heart. Indeed, he realized that the real goal was to wholly redefine humanity's role from "conqueror to plain member and citizen" of the biological community. Such an undertaking would take energy, endurance, and diverse talents.

In this issue of *Outlook*, we consider the task of conservation leadership. As an effective leader, Leopold knew one of his roles was to inspire the interest and energy necessary to build a movement capable of moving mountains. Teaching classes of undergraduates at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, Leopold encouraged students to learn about the land through inquiry and direct experience.

Leopold was able to take this approach to education even deeper with his graduate students, preparing them to become the next generation of conservation leaders. Names like McCabe, Errington, Hochbaum, Hawkins, Hickey, and Hamerstrom are but a few of those students who would go on to pioneer the science and practice of conservation in academia, government, and in not-for-profits. Even today many people still proudly trace their intellectual roots back to Leopold through these and subsequent generations of leaders, thinkers, and doers.

However, Leopold also recognized that the value of understanding our connections to the natural world was not a task to be confined to conservation professionals, and he challenged us to imagine a world where the health of the land is connected to the health of our communities and personal well-being. In our lead article, Peter Forbes reminds us that ultimately for conservation to be successful, it must be about people just as much as it is about land, air, water, and wildlife.

While we hope someday all professions are *de facto* "conservation professions," for the foreseeable future, we will still need individuals who are called to be "conservationists" to ensure we continue building a land ethic throughout our society. An important first step is to continue the efforts to honor, recruit, and engage diversity within the conservation movement. In Masi Mejia's essay "Diversifying the Field of Natural Resources," we learn how family connections and outdoor recreation inspired her interest in a wildlife career, and we also gain insights into the experience of being a Hispanic woman breaking into a white, male-dominated profession.



Laura McArthur Baraboo, Wis.

The work of conservation itself is also diverse, so Communications and Marketing Coordinator Madeline Fisher interviewed and compiled profiles of six conservation leaders that inspire us in the many different ways they put a land ethic into action. These perspectives are followed by Leopold's own insights in "A Survey of Conservation," about how conservation education needs to prepare leaders that are scientifically literate, technically capable, and ethically grounded. If Leopold had a profound impact on his graduate students, his impact on his children was the ultimate example of investing in the future of conservation. It is a unique honor to include an excerpt from Estella Leopold's new book *Stories from the Leopold Shack* where she shares reflections on her family's experience in "The Shack Enterprise."

Recognizing just how important it is to nurture, cultivate, and develop leadership for conservation, we are also excited to introduce the Aldo Leopold Foundation's next major initiative: The Future Leaders Campaign. This \$5 million campaign seeks to replicate and extend Leopold's investment in the future of conservation by providing hands-on, immersive fellowships in land stewardship and environmental education. It also grows the foundation's capacity to share this opportunity with more young leaders from all walks of life. Two of our recent fellows, Gregory Hitch and Jennie Solverson, share personal perspectives on the impacts their fellowship experiences had on cementing their commitment to conservation and preparing them for a future leadership role in advancing a land ethic.

Rounding out this issue of *Outlook* we proudly present the Wisconsin Leopold Writing Contest winners and share two essays from young leaders that eloquently and effectively articulated their own perspectives on conservation. We conclude by sharing some of the foundation's recent accomplishments and announcing upcoming events.

We hope this issue of *Outlook* reinforces just how critical it is to invest in the kind of leadership necessary to build a land ethic and we hope it will inform and inspire you to continue contributing your time, treasure, and talent to the effort. Together, we will move mountains!

Handwritten signature of Buddy Huffaker.

Buddy Huffaker, President



Diversifying the Field of Natural Resources

BY MARIA FLORENTINA "MASI" MEJIA

Just as we avoid monocultures in our wild spaces, we must aim for a diversity of natural resource professionals.

I HAVE ALWAYS HAD AN INTEREST in the outdoors. At four years old, I was playing with *toritos* (ant lions) in the dirt. At ten years old, I was catching Gulf Coast Toads in my backyard to keep as pets. In my youth, I heard stories of *abuelo* Chevo, my paternal great-grandfather, and *abuelo* Eduardo, my maternal grandfather, working cattle, training horses, walking *senderos* (paths) to see a herd of deer, or eating *tunas* (prickly-pear fruit). I was entertained with all of their *vaquero* (cowboy) stories that they told, including tales about hunting on the ranches when the work was done. I wanted to be outside, just as they were working the *monte* (south Texas scrublands). The one experience I wanted the most was to go hunting. Unfortunately, we did not have access to go hunting, as Texas is over 95 percent privately owned. Then, I learned about the Texas Youth Hunting Program (TYHP). The program offers youth the opportunity to go on hunts that are educational, affordable, and safe, all while promoting the hunting heritage of Texas.

At thirteen, I enrolled in a hunter's education course and was selected to go on my first TYHP hunt. My hunt would take place on the King Ranch, a place that Aldo Leopold had visited in 1947, calling it "some of the best jobs of wildlife restoration on the continent, [with] unparalleled opportunities for both management and research." Getting out on the ranch, I was actually more excited to be hunting than I was interested in the land itself. I now know that land management is directly tied to land ownership and a land ethic. As we drove through the many cattle guards into different pastures, I realized just how much land the King Ranch encompassed. We were driving through a pasture as my guide saw a flick of a whitetail. We got out of the truck and stalked my deer from 220 yards to 40 yards. My guide helped me set up a pair of shooting sticks which I laid my rifle on, took aim and... *boom!* I harvested my first deer.

For me, the most captivating moment of the hunt was field dressing the deer. As we worked the deer, the guide, a wildlife biologist for the King Ranch, took the time to name all the anatomical parts, from the heart, to the different parts of the four-chambered stomach, to the scent glands which deer use to mark their territory. At thirteen, I was elbow deep in deer anatomy and loving every minute. That was when I knew I wanted to pursue a career in the field of natural resources. As I matured into my late teens, I was involved in a five-day wildlife leadership camp called Texas Brigades. Texas Brigades furthered my trajectory into the field of natural resources as I took part in different camps focused on wildlife species and habitats (quail, deer, bass, coastal, waterfowl, and ranch). The connections I made during my involvement with Texas Brigades proved to be very valuable along my career trajectory. At these camps I was shown different career paths that were available in the field.

Masi (bottom left) participated in the Aldo Leopold Foundation's Rising Land Ethic Leaders program at the Murie Center in Moose, Wyo. in 2014.



Jeannine Richards, Baraboo, Wis.

When it came time to select a major in college, it was an easy choice. I chose a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Conservation of Natural Resources. I moved from my home in Laredo to Lubbock to attend Texas Tech University. My first class in my department was Introduction to Freshwater Ecology. I arrived early on the first day of class, and as students trickled in, I was shocked that not only was I the only woman in the room, but also the only Hispanic. At that moment, I realized the lack of diversity within the field. This did not hinder my success as a student; in fact, it motivated me to finish my degree and to educate underrepresented groups on the importance of our natural resources within the community.

My last semester of college approached, and like many students, I was unaware of what the future would hold. I was approached by Dr. Kerry Griffis-Kyle, a professor in the Department of Natural Resources Management at Texas Tech University, about a potential graduate opportunity with Dr. Tom Arsuffi, a professor and field station director of Texas Tech University Center at Junction. The project would focus on underrepresented groups and our natural resources. I accepted the research opportunity and the following semester we set out to design a research project that examined the factors that influence

natural resource professionals and students to pursue a career in natural resources in Texas.

Our research was conducted on natural resource professionals who worked for state agencies, federal agencies, non-profit organizations, higher education, and students whose contact information was publicly available in the state of Texas.

The research showed that most natural resource professionals and students in Texas were white males: 28 percent of the people that participated were females, and only 14 percent were ethnic minorities: Individuals across genders and ethnicities identified



Courtesy of Masi Mejia

experiences they had as children, both formally and with their families, as important influences in their decision to pursue their career. These experiences in their youth helped fuel their genuine interest and passion in the field of natural resources. The research also found that having an effective mentor that exposed them to field opportunities also had a positive influence on choosing natural resources as a profession. The reasons that made individuals question staying in this field were low pay and lack of administrative support in the field—and even more importantly, workplace racism and sexism. The results of the research show that to increase interest in natural resource professions, we must make sure that we give everyone a chance to experience the outdoors intimately as children, and avoid the assumption that only a certain segment of children will be interested. The profession also should work on mentoring students in high school and in college to provide positive experiences as well as educating ourselves better in workplace civility through diversity and inclusion training.

The field of natural resources has historically, and even recently, been a white-male-dominated field. Just as we avoid monocultures in our wild spaces, we must aim for a diversity of natural resource professionals.

As land stewards, we must continue to evolve with our nation's changing demographics, to ensure that our wild lands and wild spaces continue to be preserved for future generations. Texas is a majority-minority state, where ethnic minorities account for 54 percent of the general public; however, ethnic minority natural resource professionals in the state of Texas account for less than

15 percent. The conservation profession must cast a wider net to engage a changing public, whether it is through informal science education or a family activity in the outdoors. As land stewards and natural resource professionals, we may not persuade every individual to become a biologist or ecologist, but through our efforts of engaging the public, we may foster an appreciation for our natural resources.

Equally, as professionals we must provide inclusive environments to support individuals with diverse backgrounds. In providing inclusive work environments, professionals need to cultivate the natural interests and passions of incoming students and professionals to ensure that we retain these individuals in the field. Experienced natural resource professionals can work with

We must make sure that we give everyone a chance to experience the outdoors intimately as children, and avoid the assumption that only a certain segment of children will be interested.

novice professionals as mentors to provide enjoyable experiences and instill natural resource lessons. Regardless of the action taken to diversify the field of natural resources, positive action must be taken to ensure that our changing public yearns to care for and conserve our wild spaces.

Even though I am a minority in relation to gender and ethnicity, the factors that influenced my decision to pursue a career in the field were similar to other natural resource professionals. I have always had familial support in my formal education and informal exploration of the outdoors. My mama allowed me to play in the dirt and catch frogs, and my family used the deer I harvested in a *tamalada* (a gathering to make tamales). As natural resource professionals, we must seek to provide opportunities that allow everyone to connect to the land—especially those with diverse backgrounds, as they are expected to be the United States majority by 2050. Across the board, these opportunities should positively influence individuals to cherish the natural resources that provide clean air, clean water, and access to outdoor recreation. As we approach opportunities to include the public in the care and conservation of our natural resources, we must remind ourselves of the public's different backgrounds, knowledge, and perspectives. Keeping this diversity in mind and being inclusive in welcoming all kinds of people to the field, we can nurture an inherent need for nature. ■



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