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ALDO LEOPOLD — A Fierce Green Fire

Early in his career with the forest service, Aldo Leopold felt the elimination of predators was the key to effective game management, a concept endorsed by wildlife experts at the time.

Assigned to serve in New Mexico and the Southwest, part of his duty was to eliminate wolves, bears, and cougars. An experience involving the shooting of a mother wolf and her pup affected his thinking.

We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes—known only to her and the mountain.

This experience haunted Leopold and it took a long time for him to understand the implications of what he had done.

I was young then and full of trigger-itch. I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves

would mean hunters' paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain would agree with such a view.

Aldo came to realize that the popular idea of conservation is tied to economic gain, not to the overall welfare of the land. Killing the predators results in another problem—too many deer or other wildlife for the land to support. Clear-cutting timber, plowing up prairie and draining swamps helped set up the dust bowl problems of the 1930s. He wrote:

Man always kills the thing he loves and so we, the pioneers, have killed our wilderness. Some say we had to. Be that as it may, I am glad I shall never be young without wild country to be young in. Of what avail are forty freedoms without a blank spot on the map?

Aldo Leopold was born in Iowa in 1888, a year after the Boone and Crockett Club was founded by Theodore Roosevelt and George Bird Grinnell. His family was heavily involved in the outdoors, and hunting and woodcraft were his passion. In 1900,

BOOKS BY ALDO LEOPOLD

Game Management (1933)

A Sand County Almanac (1949)

Round River (1953)

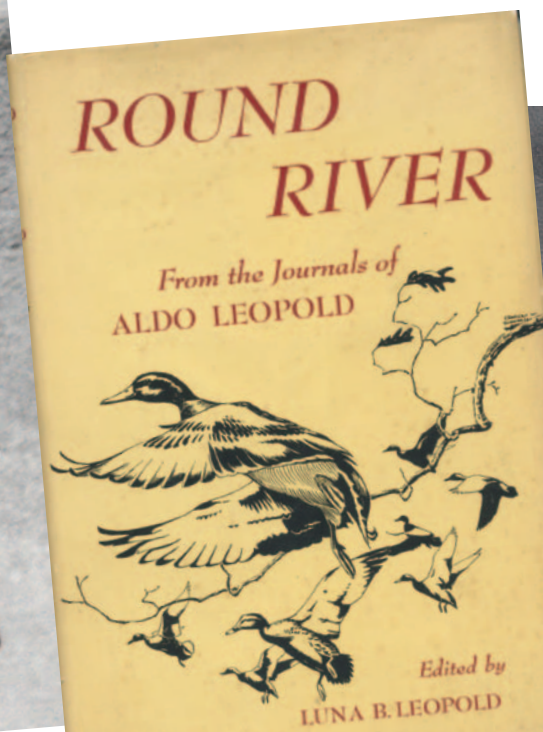
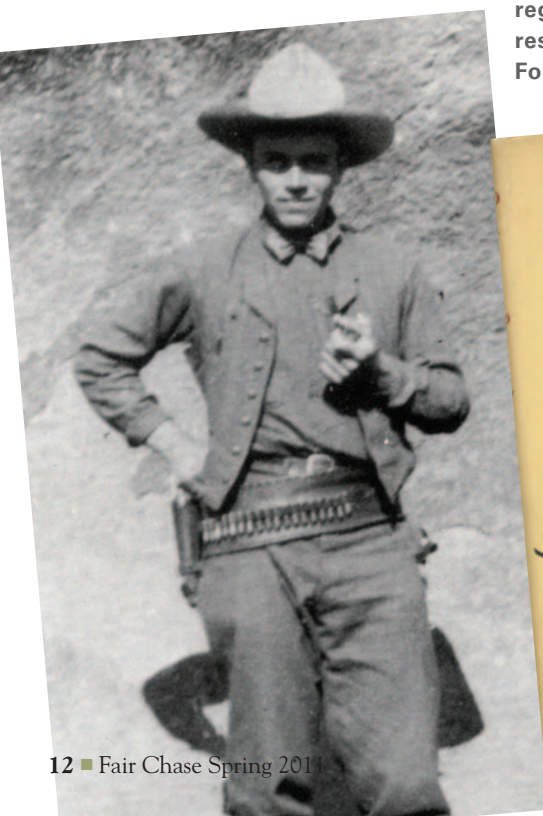
Gifford Pinchot donated money to Yale University to initiate one of the nation's first forestry programs. Hearing of this, the teenage Leopold decided on forestry as a career. He went on to become one of Yale's earliest forestry graduates.

Leopold's early career took him to the Southwest. During his 15 years there, he helped develop the first comprehensive management plan for the Grand Canyon, wrote the forest service's first game and fish handbook, and proposed the Gila Wilderness Area, the first national wilderness area in the forest service system.

In 1924, Leopold accepted transfer to the U.S. Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin, and became its associate director. In 1933 he was appointed professor of game management at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, the first such professorship of wildlife management.

During their time in Madison, Leopold and his family longed for a place to escape

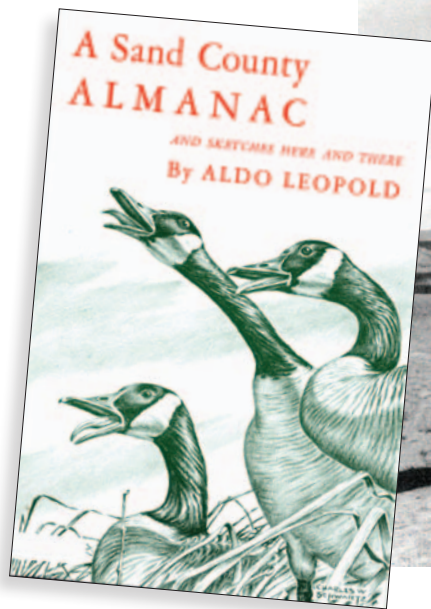
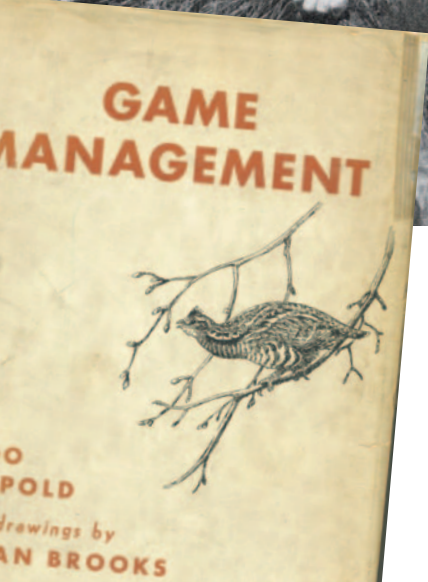
ACROSS BOTTOM: Deputy Supervisor Leopold with a six-shooter on his hip. ■ *Round River* (1953) ■ Aldo Leopold, assistant director of the USDA Forest Products Laboratory in Madison. A coworker called him "a fish out of water...We were scientists, engineers; Leopold was a forester." ■ *Game Management* (1933) ■ Leopold in 1946 measuring the growth of the pines planted at the Shack. **RIGHT TOP:** *A Sand County Almanac* (1949) ■ The Gila Wilderness area — the first region in the national forest system specifically set aside to be kept wild. As the person responsible for creating the designation, Leopold is called the "Father of the National Forest Wilderness System."



from the urban setting. Aldo purchased eighty acres in the sand country of central Wisconsin. It was a broken-down abandoned farm that had been so badly neglected that he was able to buy it for \$8 an acre. Over the next 13 years, the Leopold family made this their retreat. Their efforts at restoring the land turned it into a wildlife paradise. Aldo's experiences and the journals he kept became the basis for *A Sand County Almanac*, considered by many to be the most outstanding and influential work on land conservation ever written. His efforts to have the book published met with rejection by the publishers to which it was submitted, and it was not until after his death in 1948 that Oxford agreed to publish his book.

Aldo Leopold was a founding member of the Wilderness Society and he belonged to a number of conservation organizations including the Boone and Crockett Club. He had just become an advisor on conservation to the United Nations when he died of a heart attack while fighting a grass fire on a neighbor's farm. His legacy lives on with *A Sand County Almanac*, which has been translated into several foreign languages. It has sold more than two million copies. ■

Aldo Leopold
Robert J. Holsten Jr.



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