



Read • Discuss

*Aldo Leopold*

# Green Fire Discussion Guide

THE ALDO  
LEOPOLD  
FOUNDATION

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## *CLARIFICATION:*

- What are some impressions you have of Aldo Leopold and his life after watching the film?
- What was the time he lived in like?
- What was life like for him as a young forester in the Southwest and how did it change his thinking?
- What about his life in Wisconsin?

## *INTERPRETATION:*

### GENERAL:

- How have attitudes toward the natural world changed since Leopold's time? Since the first settlers arrived in America? In all human history?
- Near the beginning of the film, Baird Callicott says that Leopold, Muir, and Thoreau are the giants on whose shoulders we all stand. Why do you think many people know Thoreau and Muir, but fewer are familiar with Leopold? How does he compare to them?
- Leopold said "our tools are better than we are." What did he mean? Do you agree?

### FAMILY/SHACK:

- How did Aldo Leopold's upbringing build his later ideas? How did he convey his values to his children?
- Aldo Leopold chose his own land and Shack based on its "lack of goodness." Why? How did that affect his and his family's experience there?
- What does "green fire" mean to you?

### SPECIES PRESERVATION:

- Views on predators have changed considerably, at least among some constituencies, since Leopold's early career, mainly informed by a scientific understanding of the role predators play in an ecosystem. Can you think of other examples of how science has fueled a change of mind in society?
- Sandhill cranes have been brought back from the brink of extinction through tremendous effort. Other species, like the passenger pigeon, have been lost forever. What does it mean to lose a species permanently? Is it worth the effort to save ones that are endangered?
- How would you feel about having wolves or other large predators where you live?

### LAND PRESERVATION:

- What did Leopold mean by land health? How is that idea different from species conservation or land preservation?
- Leopold suggests that “only a mountain has lived long enough to listen objectively to the howl of a wolf.” What does he mean? Is a mountain alive? How?
- Do you think it is important to have designated wilderness? Why or why not?

### *IMPLICATION:*

#### THINKING ABOUT YOUR COMMUNITY:

- Aldo Leopold saw tremendous change and transformation of the landscape around him during his lifetime which greatly influenced his thinking. How has the land where you live changed within your lifetime? Has it affected your thinking?
- Leopold calls land “a community.” Think about your own idea of community—who does your definition include? How do you feel about your community including “soils, waters, plants, and animals”?
- Do we have a greater responsibility to the land than other members of the ecosystem do? Why?

#### DEFINING A LAND ETHIC:

- Leopold describes the power of seeing the “green fire” die in the wolf’s eye, but he didn’t understand until many years later why his actions felt wrong. Have you ever done something you thought was right, but regretted it later? What made you change your mind?
- How does a relationship with land differ from a relationship with a person? How is it the same?
- Leopold wrote that he couldn’t define a land ethic because “nothing so important as an ethic is ever written.” He suggested instead that it evolves “in the minds of a thinking community.” What does it mean to define a land ethic for your community? How would you begin to work toward that?

#### PUTTING A LAND ETHIC INTO PRACTICE:

- There will always be conflict in conservation. Can Leopold’s ideas help us to work through some of the them? What is our role in putting them into practice today?
- How does a land ethic apply in urban areas?
- How would you “live on a piece of land without spoiling it”?
- What does it mean for an individual to “think like a mountain”? For our whole society?

NOTES