

Striding Forward in Wild and Rugged Territory

Despite nearly a century of propaganda, conservation still proceeds at a snail's pace; progress still consists largely of letterhead pieties and convention oratory. On the back forty we still slip two steps backward for each forward stride.

Aldo Leopold, "The Ecological Conscience," 1947

The beginning of Leopold's essay "The Ecological Conscience" seems particularly haunting given current events and the magnitude of the challenges we face today. At two events this spring, we paused to consider the progress that has been made over the last century as we helped commemorate the centennial of Aldo Leopold's graduation from the Yale Forest School and the beginning of his professional career with the US Forest Service.

Imagine what the atmosphere would have been like a hundred years ago as Leopold was anticipating his graduation, wondering whether his education and experiences had adequately prepared him for entry into the new world of professional forestry in the wild and rugged Arizona Territory, not yet even a state. Perhaps he felt not unlike this year's graduates wondering if they will be adequately prepared to enter the new world of sustainability in the wild and rugged territory of globalization.

Each generation has had its own challenges to face whether it be civil war, world war, or even nuclear annihilation. But in those "clear and present" dangers, the causes and consequences, while complicated, were relatively comprehensible. The threats posed by our rapidly growing population, in tandem with unprecedented per-capita consumption, are by comparison incomprehensible in scope and scale precisely because they seem invisible when discussed as parts per million in our oceans and atmosphere.

Never before have there been as many individuals that want to be part of the sustainability solution. And yet too many of us are unwilling to take the first step on the road to recovery—admitting we are part of the problem. Like all living organisms we are consumers, but so many of the things we consume

today—cars, computers, cell phones—are so ubiquitous that they are almost transparent in our lives. They are just there.

The most direct connection we all still have to the land (though, admittedly, equally vague to most) is food. At the most basic level, food is derived of soil, water, and sun. In "The Farmer as a Conservationist," Leopold exclaims his fundamental understanding of this connection and the subsequent challenge, "What kinds of self-expression will one day be possible in the landscape of a cornbelt farm? What will conservation look like when transplanted from the convention hall to the fields and woods?"

In addition to Leopold's own provocative essay, "The Outlook for Farm Wildlife," which ends on a note of hope for the eventual fate of family farms, this issue features three of the most eloquent and insightful voices and actors on the contemporary stage of agricultural and food sustainability. Wendell Berry, Wes Jackson, and Gary Paul Nabhan form an accomplished and thoughtful trio in extending Leopold's

call for accepting responsibility, questioning material desires, and changing our core values. Like Leopold, what makes these three so effective is that their insightful eloquence on these profound and profane issues is directly informed by their own efforts to improve the health of the land.

I hope this issue of *The Outlook* will challenge you to think in new ways about where your food comes from and inspire you to connect with the food systems native to your place.



Buddy Huffaker, *Executive Director*



Buddy's daughter, Eva, prepares to plant a lupine at the Leopold Center.