

2009 Events Honor Leopold

By ANTHONY ANELLA
Co-chair, Aldo Leopold Centennial Celebration

Words that end in “-ology” inspire a productive humility. Those five letters indicate an intent to study in order to understand the truth about something. In contrast, the suffix “-ism” imposes a certain dogma on whatever it touches (fundamentalism — of any stripe — comes to mind).

“Ologies” approach the world with a reverence for learning. “Isms” impoverish us. Solipsism is the sin of perpetually regarding ourselves in a mirror at the expense of what can be learned from others. Geology, biology, and most critical of all, ecology, allow us to see ourselves as part of a larger reality.

By emphasizing this larger reality, Aldo Leopold gave new meaning to the word community. This rare wisdom was the inspiration for the Aldo Leopold Centennial Celebration (ALCC) in 2009. We began with the simple mission of trying to raise awareness of Aldo Leopold in New Mexico, to reclaim him as part of our state’s rich cultural heritage, and to bring the land ethic more meaningfully into decisions that will shape our state’s natural and cultural landscape.

Thanks to Susan Flader, Carlos Vasquez, and all the others who organized the kickoff event, “A Cultural Conversation: Aldo Leopold, the Southwest, and the Evolution of a Land Ethic for the Future,” the ALCC began as a conversation rather than a sermon. “A Cultural Conversation” took place at the National Hispanic Cultural Center in Albuquerque. We heard voices that historically have not been invited to the environmental table, and learned, as Leopold suggested, that the land ethic is continually evolving — made more vibrant and more vital through the diverse cultural perspectives that share a genuine respect for the Land.

Some of the most meaningful events of the ALCC involved youth and were intergenerational:

Children and their parents planted more than 100 trees in the newly dedicated Aldo Leopold Forest, located in a part of the cottonwood bosque along the Rio Grande in Albuquerque that had burned in a wildfire.

Students in grades K-5 from the Manzano Mesa Multigenerational Center’s afterschool program, along with two senior citizens from the center, were in a play based on “Thinking Like A



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Bosque School students Adam Velazquez, Liam Frye-Mason and Alejandro Taylor-Wright plant a tree along the Bosque in February in honor of Aldo Leopold.

Mountain.”

The Leopold Legacy Film Competition for aspiring filmmakers of all ages complemented the Leopold Legacy Film Series.

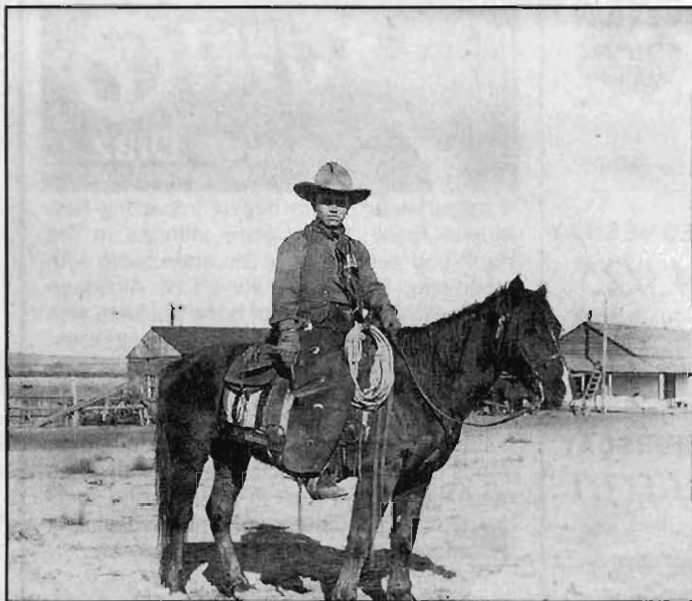
An ongoing community conversation, “Thinking Like A Foodshed,” is dedicated to promoting local food production in the middle Rio Grande Valley.

New Mexico Reads Aldo Leopold, modeled on the Wisconsin program, included more than a dozen readings with readers of all ages.

The Quivira Coalition’s Eighth Annual Conference, “Living Leopold: The Land Ethic and a New Agrarianism” attracted more than 500 participants from around the country.

And 465 students in grades 6-12 — from both rural and urban New Mexico — wrote a letter to Mr. Leopold telling him how or why his writing is important today. Nine judges, including three active or retired university English professors, picked one winner from each grade category and 10 honorable mentions, awarding \$3,500 in prizes. The award ceremony took place at the Quivira Coalition’s Annual Conference. Photos of the three students and parts of the three winning letters also appeared on the front page of the Albuquerque Journal, and KUNM broadcast an hour-long interview with the student authors.

All told, more than 90 parallel but independently organized events contributed to the success of the ALCC. For a complete list, please see www.LeopoldCelebration.org.



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Pioneering environmentalist Aldo Leopold gave new meaning to the word community.

org.

The Bosque School provided the glue that held the year’s efforts together.

From the Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program, which allows students to provide scientific data for use by various federal agencies, to an emphasis on the relationship between the arts and nature, the Bosque School keeps alive a personal connection between its predominantly urban students and nature that, I believe, Aldo Leopold would wholeheartedly endorse. The school also provided office space for Dara Johnson, the extraordinary coordinator of the ALCC, and administrative support for Sheryl Russell, her equally extraordinary assistant coordinator. Together Dara

and Sheryl helped make the ALCC not just a success, but a joy!

It is fitting that an ending would inspire a beginning. As the Aldo Leopold Centennial Celebration draws to a close we are intent on preserving the compelling momentum we have built.

To this end, we are proposing that a Southwest Center for Land Ethics be created. Dedicated to enriching the cultural conversation through which Aldo Leopold’s legacy may continue to evolve “in the minds of a thinking community,” the idea of the center is just emerging.

This much is certain: it will avoid dogma while inviting many voices — and many “ologies” — to the table.