

Issues, Issues Everywhere Activity – Aldo Leopold: Learning from Mistakes Article

Aldo Leopold was born in 1887 to a German American family who loved the great outdoors. Aldo's grandfather was a naturalist and taught him about the many different kinds of birds that migrated over their home in Burlington, Iowa. His father taught him about the responsibility of hunting for recreation, and his mother helped him understand the beauty of nature. Much of his youth was spent exploring and hunting in the woods and marshes along the Mississippi River.

At sixteen, Aldo went on to study the science of forestry at Yale University. After he graduated, he took a job with the Forest Service in the New Mexico and Arizona territories. He enjoyed speaking with local hunters, ranchers and foresters about creating game refuges. He believed that sport hunters should take part in protecting the wilderness where they hunted.

Many events helped to shape Aldo's attitude about humans and their relationship with nature. Early in his career, Aldo worked to form a policy that allowed the killing of wolves and mountain lions in the Southwest. He felt that by killing these natural predators, the number of deer would increase for sport hunting. He even went hunting and killed wolves himself.

Many years later, he heard reports that the deer population in the Southwest had grown out of hand. The large number of deer had damaged vegetation and the animals were threatened with starvation. The Forest Service ordered a road cut through the protected Gila wilderness, and hunters were allowed in to reduce the deer population. Aldo deeply regretted his decision to eliminate the wolves and mountain lions.

He spent the rest of his life with a changed attitude about the role of people and nature. He felt that his early efforts at conservation did not work because he had an attitude that people could do anything they wanted with the land. After changing his attitude, Aldo believed that the soil, water, plants and animals (including people) of the land were all connected. He saw that all the elements represented important links in a chain that kept the earth a healthy place to live. If one link were weakened, then the strength of the whole chain would be threatened.

Aldo Leopold was a conservationist who believed that people could learn from their mistakes. His ideas about conservation helped Americans understand that the wilderness is a very precious and necessary resource.



Image source:

<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/caer/ce/eeek/nature/aldo.htm>

Adapted from: Environmental Issues (Hand-On Minds-On Science Series): Intermediate, by Pauline Chandler and Environmental Portraits – People Making a Difference for the Environment, by Kim Sakamoto Steidl.