

A Sand County Almanac Study Guide

A Sand County Almanac by Aldo Leopold

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Plot Summary

A Sand County Almanac is a wonderful book about conservation and the need for a human conscience towards the use of land. The first twelve chapters are great descriptions of nature and the way plants and animals interact with each other for survival. The following chapters are about different places that the narrator has visited, and he takes the reader through amazing journeys through his memories. The final chapters are about the need to create a social conscience towards the environment and the land. Land ethic is the main argument of this book. It states that people should care less about what they can gain monetarily from the land, and more about what they can gain in the long run from engaging in long term sustainability of it.

The first few chapters are beautifully written. The reader can really understand the importance of each animal in the food chain, and how each acts in order to survive and sustain their own species. In the winter, small woodland animals seek the shelter of the trees and live below ground to protect themselves from the frost. A small rodent comes out of his hole just to see if the winter is almost over, and if any signs of spring are present. If he is lucky, he will remain unseen, and the hawk that flies overhead will miss him. Everything in the environment works by chance, and the second an animal slips up, it risks losing its life. The narrator also takes the reader through winding rivers in a canoe and explains that the river is curvy and long as it wants to avoid being dumped into the ocean with the rest of the world's water. It wants to enjoy being on land and seeing the coyotes and the deer that come out with their young to drink from it.

Finally, he talks about conservation and the scientific aspect of it. More than just scientific, it is a social need. It cannot exist without people who love and care for the environment. Everyone needs to develop a social conscience and respect the environment. There are two different types of conservation in this society. Those that want to conserve for economic gain, such as loggers, and those that want to conserve for the good of the different ecosystems in the world. The second is the optimal way of thinking, but it doesn't present any monetary benefits which is why it isn't the most sought after way of dealing with conservation. The government has not done enough to protect land, because they don't understand how to. The scientists don't even know how. The only way that the government can do anything to protect the land is if it places a monetary value on the environment. Anything that doesn't bring an economic gain faces extinction, and that is the main negative argument of this book. It is a sad truth, but more and more species are being lost everyday. Most of them are unspectacular, and people don't care about them. The only thing that people can do is to be cautious of any damage done to land. This will help scientists buy time to figure out what needs to be done. If they aren't given the chance, then the land will suffer. People will be doomed to face inevitable self destruction from progress that has done so much, and is hurting people at the same time.



Chapter 1, January

Chapter 1, January Summary and Analysis

A Sand County Almanac is a wonderful book about conservation and the need for a human conscience towards the use of land. The first twelve chapters are great descriptions of nature and the way plants and animals interact with each other for survival. The following chapters are about different places that the narrator has visited, and he takes the reader through amazing journeys through his memories. The final chapters are about the need to create a social conscience towards the environment and the land. Land ethic is the main argument of this book. It states that people should care less about what they can gain monetarily from the land, and more about what they can gain in the long run from engaging in long term sustainability of it.

The book begins with the January thaw. Each year after the midwinter blizzards, the winter begins to thaw and brings dripping water, which is heard everywhere. Hibernating creatures are awakened, and the first to get up is the skunk. Animals move very slowly during this time. There is so little going on that a person can follow animal tracks and figure out what they've done and how they've done it. The meadow mouse lives in the winter by creating little tunnels in the snow. These tunnels will soon be exposed to everyone and everything around. If the mouse is not careful, it will become prey to the rough legged hawk that follows the trails from above. The narrator follows the skunk tracks that eventually enter the woods. He sees newly exposed oak seedlings, and the trail ends at a pile of driftwood. He turns back to go home wondering what the skunk has gotten into.



Chapter 2, February and Chapter 3, March

Chapter 2, February and Chapter 3, March Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, the narrator tells the reader about his oak tree. The oak tree outside of his house was special as it managed to escape being eaten by the rabbits and actually grew to be a tree. It was a faithful companion providing wood for the family for over eighty years. The narrator is proud of his tree and likes knowing that it has experienced so much. A storm hits, and while everyone is inside with their warm drinks, they hear thunder crash down with the terrible sight of lightning. Knowing that it was very close by, they go to their rooms where they feel safer and wait the storm out. The following day, they see that the lightning hit the tree, killing it completely. The narrator waits a few days before cutting down his beloved old tree. He calls on a friend to help him and, as he starts cutting through the rings, he recalls what happened in each year that the tree was alive. Some occasions were simple. There were droughts, heavy rainfall, and blizzards. Others were more eventful and important such as when the government started to intervene in the environment and created the different land management bureaus.

March is about the geese and their inevitable flight to the marshes of Sand County. They are remarkable birds that must know when to return to the area. They cannot be mistaken like a muskrat which can emerge for a sunbath only to find that a blizzard continues outside. They travel two hundred miles from the north to find a hole in the marsh. If there is no opening, they can't simply return home and try again in a few months. They need to be certain that they will be successful. The geese have made these journeys since the Pleistocene era throughout the world and are experts at international commerce. Perhaps this is why the narrator respects them so much. There was always the occasional lone goose that stumped the narrator for a while. This was until he came to the conclusion that a lone goose is simply a goose whose family has been shot by hunters, since most geese travel in families of six. Geese flock together, and a lone goose is not natural, rather a cause of human involvement.



Chapter 4, April

Chapter 4, April Summary and Analysis

April is when the narrator can expect the snow to melt away and flood the land where he lives. Though he looks forward to this time, nobody is more excited than the carp. They are visibly happy with the new water levels as they splash through the water and hit the cat tails, swimming through the (flooded) covered road and trails. Every other animal is pushed out of their homes temporarily, but they find refuge in higher land. The narrator likes this time, because the only traffic build up is by the fish. His road is flooded over, and no car can pass. He writes about a flower called Draba. It isn't spectacular, and nobody really knows it is there unless they search for it on their hands and knees. No animal eats it, and no poet has ever written about it, yet it gets its job done. It pollinates, spreads, and is still a part of the ecosystem.

Bur Oak is a type of oak tree that has an extremely thick bark that can withstand fire. Before human settlers came into the picture, the prairie lands were in a war against natural fires. During these fires, the rabbits and the mice would plow down all the herbs before the fires got to them. The squirrels would gather all of the acorns and eat them throughout the winter. The bur oaks could survive all of the animals and the burning because of their bark. However, in the 1840's when people began to settle in the area, they plowed fields to deprive the prairie of fire to save the harvests. Oak seedlings that otherwise would have been burned or gathered began to flourish, and the prairie region turned into woodlot farms. All the trees in the area date back to the 1850's and 1860's, the same time that fires ceased to exist in the prairie lands. It is amazing to think that if there were never any fires, the prairie lands would have been thick forests. The narrator says that anyone who owns a veteran bur oak owns a piece of historical history and a symbol of the prairie war.

The narrator then writes about the woodcock and the amazing sky dance that it does. Every year on the first warm evening in April at 6:50pm, the woodcock begins its show. It goes out in the open on a mossy spot, a streak of sand, a bare rock or roadway. It does this, because it has short legs and cannot do the dance properly in the brush or grass. It then begins its overture by letting out throaty chirps spaced every two seconds apart. The chirping stops, and the bird flies up towards the sky in a series of wide spirals letting out a musical twitter. He goes up and up until he is a small speck in the sky, then tumbles down like a "crippled plane" letting out a soft loose warble. Before he hits the ground, he starts chirping again landing in the same spot that he started in. He does this for about an hour or until it gets too dark to continue. At daybreak, he starts again. One thing that nobody knows is where the female bird is. The narrator has seen two woodcocks sky dance, but didn't know if it was a couple, or two competing males.



Chapter 5, May and Chapter, 6 June

Chapter 5, May and Chapter, 6 June Summary and Analysis

The upland plover comes home to the prairie in May after being in the Argentine for the winter. The bird arrives and claims part of every person's farm with indifference. The birds lay eggs, and when they hatch, the chicks take only thirty days to grow up and learn how to fly. They do all of this by August. When the air starts to turn too cool for them, they go back to Argentina proving that nature knows all about "hemispheric solidarity," something that people have yet to learn.

While the upland plover is in the prairie land, it blends in well. It follows the buffalo, nests in hayfields, and is smart enough to avoid the hay mowers. It really has only two natural enemies which are the gully and the drainage ditch, which the narrator says may be man's enemies as well. Then a third enemy came about with universal gunpowder and a taste for plover-on-toast that the post Victorian people began to crave. The federal migratory bird laws arrived just in time to save the plovers.

In Chapter Six, the narrator goes fishing at the Alder Fork. The main stream was really low and too warm to support trout. The narrator then asks what a self respecting trout would do in this situation. His answer was to go upstream. He took his rod, reel, and flies upstream looking for the fish. As he smoked a cigarette, he stopped to think about the "ways of trout and men." He spots a black hole above the alder that is shaded by greenness. He spots a trout and decides that he is going to do the impossible. He is going to fly fish sending the fly downstream. He blows on the fly to fluff it and sends it out. When the line straightens out, he starts walking downstream. He hears the rush of the fish, and the battle is on. He gets a hold of the fish and gets him up into the open water. He caught three trout that day. None were record breakers, but it was the chance that he took to catch them that was the big deal.



Chapter 7, July

Chapter 7, July Summary and Analysis

The narrator legally owns one hundred and twenty acres of land, according to the County Clerk. Yet the clerk has set hours that start at nine in the morning and end at five in the evening. This is the narrator's logic for stating that he owns far more than his designated acres. He is the "sole owner of all the acres [he] can walk over." He states that he has tenants just like all land owners, which are the animals that live in the prairie lands. They don't pay rent, and they are not very strict with their boundaries. He leaves his house at 3:30am with a notebook and coffee. At 3:35am, the sparrows come out and begin to sing. Then the robin comes, followed by the orioles who want the branch where the robin is perched. The bluebird comes out at 3:50am, then the wren, the grosbeaks, thrashers, yellow warblers, vireos, towhees, and the cardinals. All take part in a morning song with each other. After trying to jot down the order of the chirping and singing birds, he gets up to inspect the area a bit more with his dog. Sometimes they see rabbits, minks and deer. Other times, they just see their footprints. The sun starts to come up, and he can hear his neighbors tractor. The narrator then states that the world shrinks back to the rigid dimensions and borders that the county clerk sets for everyone. He has to get off of his neighbors property before he is caught trespassing.

Every week from April to September, there are about ten wild plants that go into season. Nobody knows about all of their birthdays, but nobody can ignore all of them because of allergies. Every July, the narrator passes through a country graveyard to visit a distinct weed called silphium. It is a triangular plant with saucer-sized yellow flower blooms. It has been successful in the graveyard only because it has escaped the scythe and the mower. It is most likely the last plant of its kind that exists in the western half of the states. Every year, the remaining silphium gets plowed down by mowers, making the graveyard a perfect place for this plant. Nobody notices it is there. Perhaps they never will, and this plant will be lost forever.

The flora in the area is shrinking because of clean farming, woodlot grazing, and good roads. All of these things are necessary evils, but none of them benefit from erasing a part of nature. People grieve only for what they know. The disappearance of the silphium isn't any cause for grief for the average person since people have only seen it in a botany book. The narrator tried to transplant a silphium, but couldn't even get down to the root of the plant. He then tried to plant silphium seeds, which resemble meaty sunflower seeds. The plants came up quickly, but five years later, they were still juveniles and hadn't grown a flower stalk yet. He guessed that it probably took a decade for the plant to mature, and that his plant in the cemetery probably dated back to 1850. Few people grieved the buffalo when they were stripped from Wisconsin, and even less will grieve the silphium.



Chapter 8, August and Chapter 9, September

Chapter 8, August and Chapter 9, September Summary and Analysis

Most paintings become famous because their paint is durable and can be viewed by people across several generations. The narrator likes to view one painting that is seldom viewed. It is a river that holds a brush and paints a beautiful scene only to erase it quickly after and exist only in the viewer's mind. The work begins with a ribbon of silt that is brushed on the sand of the receding shore. This dries, and the goldfinches bathe in its pools, and animals cover it with their tracks. The silt ribbon starts to turn green with eleocharis, which turns into a thick turf that is dense and so lush that the mice come out to play in it and leave neat mouse trails throughout. Now to view the finished painting, give the river three more weeks. When it is visited on a bright morning just after the sun has melted the fog, the artist's work is visible with beautiful colors and sprayed with dew. The narrator makes it clear that a person cannot return for a second viewing, because there is none. Water either dries it out, or covers it completely. People can only hope that the river will be in the mood to paint again in the future.

When September comes around, the day starts with the help of birds singing their songs, though there are some breaks in the songs by silence. People tend to ignore the song birds that sing all the time and only really hear when a crane trumpets, or a prairie chicken booms out of nowhere. In June, it is predictable that the robin starts to sing right when it turns light. Yet, in the autumn, the robin is silent, and nobody knows whether there will be a covey chorus.



Chapter 10, October

Chapter 10, October Summary and Analysis

October is the hunting season for the rough grouse in Adams County. The best time to hunt for the grouse is when the tamaracks turn smoky gold. They turn the right color when the northern frosts start and bring down the sparrows, woodcock and juncos. The narrator says that different hunts have different flavors. The sweetest hunts are those that are stolen by going to a place so deep in the wilderness where nobody has been or by stealing a hunt right under someone's nose. Not many hunters know that there is grouse in Adams county, and this pleases the narrator.

The tamaracks are the best indicator of when to go hunting. They grow in the swamps and in the upland springs. The narrator goes out with his dog, his lunch packed, and walks along enjoying the different birds that he sees. He eats his lunch and admires the young golden tamaracks.

Getting up early is a vice of horned owls, stars, geese, and freight trains. Some hunters get this habit from geese, others from coffee pots. A person has to arrive at the marsh early enough to hear the birds rise. They can hear the bluebirds land in the pond, but can't see them as the sun isn't up yet. If it were light out, then people would stop to listen to the birds. They would see the birds, shoot at them, then move on. The birds leave for safer waters once the day breaks and the hour of listening ends.

One way to hunt partridge is to make a plan of the hunting grounds. Another way is to wander around aimlessly walking from one red lantern to another. Red lanterns are blackberry bushes whose leaves turn red in the October sun. This is the best way to hunt for partridge. Most hunters don't know that the birds like to hang out around the berries, and spend most of their time out in the open. The narrator takes his dog out, who goes straight for the briars looking around for the birds. He and his dog have a teacher student relationship. He states that his dog wishes he would learn how to smell for partridge himself and is very patient with him. When he misses a shot, the dog turns and looks at him with an inquisitive look, then proceeds to finding another partridge.

The two arrive at a belt of alders, and the dog runs off. The narrator stops and listens for any cue from the dog. He listens for a scared partridge running through the brush, or waits for it to cluck before it flies away. Then he makes his move towards a sound. If he shoots a partridge as it takes off, then he will have satisfied his professor. If he misses, its another move towards a red lantern. The October wind blows many scents towards the dog other than just the grouse. His dog reacts differently towards each type of animal. If it is a rabbit, he points with a "humorous expression." The dog can find almost anything between one red lantern and another. The blackberry bushes color dies out at sunset on the last day of the grouse season. They glow red for only one month.



Chapter 11, November

Chapter 11, November Summary and Analysis

In November, the wind begins to pick up. It blows through the corn stalks making a humming noise, sending the loose husks up into the air in a swirl. The wind blows south towards the direction the geese are going.

During the month of November, the narrator talks about trees and their significance on his farm and in the areas around him. He states that when people invented shovels, they gave to the land and could plant trees. When people invented axes, they became takers and cut the trees down. Once these tools were created, every person could decide whether they would create or destroy plants. November is thus the month of the axe, because it is warm enough to grind an axe without freezing, yet cold enough to cut a tree down comfortably. It is up to each person to decide what he or she will cut down. With every stroke and every tree they cut, they are placing their signature on their land.

The narrator believes that not all trees are created free and equal and has a bias towards pine trees. He would rather cut the birches and leave the pines as the pines are rarer and stay green all year long. They also live for a hundred years as opposed to the birch which only lives about fifty years. Pine wood is also worth more than birch wood but that isn't as important to him. He is simply in love with pines. He also loves the aspen, because it provides food for his grouse in the winter. He also loves the tamarack, because it is nearly extinct in his area. It also sprinkles gold on the October grouse, which he calls the gunpowder bias.

The narrator also has a deep interest in brush. He likes the wahoo, because it feeds deer, rabbits, and mice and because of its bright berries. He likes the hazel for its color as well, because the purple is nice to look at. He states that his likes and dislikes of plants are traditional and go back to his grandfather's likes and dislikes.

His woods are not perfect, however. The narrator's trees have been plagued with disease, but he sees this not as a problem so much as a blessing in disguise because of all the diversity in wildlife that the diseased trees have brought to his woods. The first he mentions is the family of coons that lives in his woods that are able to escape the hunters as the trees are "bomb-proof." The coons can hide in the trees and escape the traditional capture methods that hunters use. The cured oak leaves on his trees feed the grouse. He always has more than his neighbors, though they sometimes leave to find better shelter. Wild bees fill the hollow oak trees with honeycombs too, and he gets his fair share of honey every year, though it is always less than he would like, because he isn't as skilled at extracting it as are the other animals that live in his woods. A flock of chickadees lives in his woods year round. They hurry to his woods when he begins to cut trees down stating that the sound of the axe is like a dinner bell to them. There are so many other animals that live off of diseased trees. There are the woodpeckers that chisel the pines to eat the fat grubs that live in the bark, and the wood ducks that live in



the hollow trees. All squirrels find refuge in these trees, as well. The real gift is the presence of the prothonotary warbler who nests in an old woodpecker hole during the rainy season.



Chapter 12, December

Chapter 12, December Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, the writer introduces the most basic principle of ecology which is the home range, or the area that each animal uses on a daily basis for food and shelter. By following tracks, the narrator finds that the deer move around in an area about a mile long to find food from their bed. A person can tell a lot about an animal's feeding habits for the season by looking at the plants around them. If a deer has feasted mostly on corn, then the height or length of the branches on trees will be longer. This is a good indicator of whether another farmer has protected his corn crop or not as a really hungry deer will go up on its hind legs to each branch from a tree if it is really hungry.

There are three different kinds of pine tree in Wisconsin, which are the white pine, red pine, and the jack pine. Pines do best when they are away from their parents, because they can get their own sunlight. They also do better around certain types of plants like the dewberry, for example. Pines have the reputation of being green year round. This is because they discard their old needles, which become yellow, at the same time they get their new fresh green needles.

Banding birds is a great way to learn about them. By banding them, people can learn about their migration patterns, and whether their land is inhabited by local birds year round or if it is foreign birds that come in. It is also a good indicator of population and how long the birds survive on average. Chickadee number 65290 was one of 7 birds that was banded in 1937 by the narrator. In the next five years, chickadee 65290 was the only survivor of his group. He did not survive the sixth winter, but out of ninety seven other chickadees, he was the only one to survive five winters. The narrator believes that weather is the only thing that can really kill a chickadee, because it has evolved to elude all of its other predators through evolution. He believes they have three commandments. They are to stay away from windy places, not to get wet before a blizzard, and to investigate every loud noise. The best way to trap one is to place a trap in the direction of the wind so that the chickadee will rush into it trying to escape the cold breeze on its tail feathers. Also, it never fails that when a person is out chopping down trees, chickadees come by and wait for the exposed wood to reveal any grubs or insects they love to eat.



Chapter 13, Wisconsin

Chapter 13, Wisconsin Summary and Analysis

Peoples' ability to enjoy nature begins with what is pretty or what is aesthetically pleasing. The likability of cranes is high amongst people in Wisconsin, and the appreciation of the bird increases as people study its history. A glacier came down from the north and crunched hills and valleys that became filled with water and formed a lake half as long as the state itself. The lake rose throughout the centuries, spilled over its borders and cut a channel where the river could drain itself. Residual canals were created, and the cranes appeared in the new marshlands. The lagoons disappeared eventually, but not the cranes. They stayed and bred their baby colts. Soon after, people came to the area and cut trees all around the marshland and planted crops within it. The cranes adapted to the people, eating the grain that a farmer failed to protect properly. Soon people decided that ditch digging would be a good idea, and the land booms began. The marsh was then filled with drainage canals, new fields and farmsteads. This wasn't the best idea. The crops were not successful, and the farmers left. The peat beds dried out and caught fire eventually releasing a horrid smell. The crane population dropped. The government decided to buy land, resettle farmers, and plug the ditches. The bogs began to hold moisture again, ponds began to form, and the grass fires began to get smaller and less frequent. This was all great for the cranes. The ultimate beauty is that the marshes are wild again, and the crane has its habitat back.

The Sand Counties are another area of Wisconsin that the narrator has a deep love for. The social planners saw beauty in the Sand Counties too, but for building reasons only. The narrator bought a sand farm in the 1930's, as did many people during this time. The narrator finds that the sand farms aren't as poor as people originally led on, because there are a myriad of plant species that grow in the sand. In April, the pasque-flowers bloom on every gravelly ridge. The sandwort comes out, with its white bloom, on the poorest of hilltops just before the lupine lets out its blue blooms. Finally, the tiny draba blooms in the sand. Some birds are only found in the sand counties. The clay colored sparrow is found in the sandy area as it loves jackpines, and jackpines love sand. The woodcock also loves the sand, because it can do its mating ritual freely and comfortably.

The narrator then discusses the scientific travel of an atom through time. One atom, X, breaks away from a rock and helped build a flower, which became an acorn, fed a deer, that fed an Indian all in one year. The Indian dies, and X is left in the soil where it is sucked up by a plant and lives in a leaf. The leaf is picked off by a bird for a nest. The nest is destroyed by a mouse, and X is sent back to the earth, its cycle always ending there as all things do. Then one day, X is carried out to sea by an animal and is lost there forever. For every atom lost at sea, the earth pulls another from the rocks.

One day, Y was extracted from the earth and sent through a normal natural existence from plant to animal and back again. This time, however, man got involved and captured



Y in a man made river created by a dam. Y made its way through a few fish and animals during this time, but then people developed sewer systems. Then Y, along with other atoms, became prisoners in an oily sludge where they once used to grow pasque-flowers for the visiting plovers. There are still many atoms that are released and help build useful and natural things, but not as many as there were before because of unnatural constraints.

The narrator then introduces the tragedy of the extinction of the passenger pigeon. Tourists can read the inscription on the bronze pigeon statue which talks about its virtue, but will never have the pleasure of seeing it fly overhead and deliver a message to someone. The narrator is convinced, however, that the pigeon would have been killed off anyway. If the pigeoners didn't do it, the farmers would have found a way to kill it off eventually.

Finally, the narrator talks about the Flambeau, a river in Wisconsin. He met two college boys on the river that were leaving for the military and wanted to experience nature and freedom for the last time in their lives. Running down the Flambeau River is the best experience, according to the narrator. He says that if Paul Bunyan was interested in learning about posterity that he would have asked to go to the Flambeau to view the cream white pine and the sugar maples, yellow birch and hemlock. These trees were so impressive and so profitable that they were cut down and only the diseased trees were left standing. From this devastated land, people and animals still continued to harvest from the area scavenging what they could. There are still areas of untouched land alongside the river with considerable wildlife. In 1943, the State Conservation Department began to rebuild a fifth mile section of the river as a wildlife area for the enjoyment of the people. Since then, the State Conservation Department has been trying to move back the hands of time by buying land to reestablish the wildness that used to exist. The dairy industry interfered in this, because they wanted to put a dam in place for electric power. The dam was put in, and the water in the Flambeau controlled.



Chapter 14, Illinois and Iowa

Chapter 14, Illinois and Iowa Summary and Analysis

The narrator starts this chapter by taking a bus ride through Illinois. He stares out the window and sees a grandfather and grandson sawing down an ancient cottonwood. The State College has told all the farmers that they should plant Chinese elms instead of cottonwoods, because they don't shed cotton which accumulates on window screens. The State College is more concerned with beauty and ease instead of what is natural and wild in the area. The bus passes through more farmland, He knows that the farmers there wouldn't know certain things about their farm like why they make more corn, or what a white spike flower is. They pass by a cemetery, and he sees puccoons. They're flowers that only converse with the dead. They are just like the silphium and are not spectacular, or important to people.

The bus enters into the Green River Soil Conservation District. They pass a creek bed that is as straight as a ruler. It was uncurled so that the water would flow faster, yet uphill there are contoured stir-crops that have been curled so that the water would flow slower. "The water must be confused by so much advice" he writes. Everything on these farms is done to increase profits, which is money in the bank. Everything is done easily and efficiently without any consideration for the "right way" to do things. "Illinois has no history" or regard for what it is or once was.

Afterwards, the narrator recalls his first gun and kill. He was given his shotgun at an early age to shoot rabbits. He found an air hole in the frozen lake and knew that a duck would come back to this area. He decided he would wait for it and sat in the frozen mud. He waited all afternoon. Finally, at sunset, he saw a single, black duck circle down. He shot at it and was delighted when it hit the snowy ice with a thud, its belly up, and red legs kicking in the air. His father then gave him permission to shoot partridges, but only if they were in flight, and never if they were perched in a tree. He made his first partridge kill in his second hunting season.



Chapter 15, Arizona and New Mexico

Chapter 15, Arizona and New Mexico Summary and Analysis

When the narrator lived in Arizona, the White Mountain was run by horsemen who were the only people that could travel to the county sized plateau that everyone called the "top." The top was exclusively for men mounted on horses. This ended during Henry Ford's revolution, because now planes can take anyone to the top.

In the winter, however, the top was even inaccessible to the horsemen because of snow piles in the meadows and little canyons. Every year in the spring, there was a small competition to be the first rider to get to the top of the mountain. Whoever made it first was the "man-of-the-year." In the summer, the weather is unpredictable. On a fair morning, the mountain is easy to travel through, and every living thing is out singing, chirping, and moving around. Then an hour later, the thunder from above crashes down. The explosions of the lightning hitting the ground are fearsome. Those that do not fear lightning have never heard it on the mountain.

At the top of the mountain was a great meadow with edges that curled and crenelated with bays and coves. Nobody could possibly know all the terrain on the top because, if every inch had been discovered, there would surely be more songs written about the mountain. The history of the place is written in bark inscriptions by passersby and by the names of its areas such as Boneyard, The Campbell Blue, Frijole Cienega, and Paradise Ranch. The narrator has never returned to the White Mountain. He prefers it this way, because he doesn't want to remember it any differently than when he first experienced it.

In the next section, the narrator introduces the wolf and its loud howl that echoes through the mountain. Everything that lives in the area knows the call and respects it for its message. The sound tingles through a person's spine when they hear it or see the wolf tracks left behind from a morning walk. The deer know to be wary, the pine trees know to expect blood upon their trunks, yet only the mountain knows how to listen to the wolf objectively. The first time the narrator shot a wolf, he watched it die and saw the knowledge that lay in its eyes. He used to believe that less wolves meant more deer, but this wasn't the case in the long run.

The states started to get rid of their wolves in order to optimize hunting. This ended up backfiring because, without the wolves that controlled the deer population, more and more deer survived and ate away all of their own food supply. The end result was a barren mountain with deer that had starved to death. The same will happen with cattlemen who have cleared their land of wolves and have let the cows roam around with no natural boundaries. As everyone strives for safety, prosperity and comfort, life becomes dull. A measure of success is how easy our lives are, yet too much safety means danger in the long run.



The narrator ends with a discussion of Escudilla, a mountain peak. Anywhere a person stands, he or she can see Escudilla. The only place it isn't seen is while standing on top of it. A person could not see the mountain but he or she could feel it. However, nobody sought it because of the big grizzly bear that lived atop it like a king in his castle. He was a strong bear. Each spring, he would come down the mountain to feed on livestock. The narrator saw one of the cows that it killed with its skull smashed in. Once the bear got its fill, it went back to the mountain and remained there peacefully eating berries, roots, and other nutritious things.

Then people started talking about progress, and a community couldn't have progress with a wild grizzly bear roaming around terrorizing cattle. The state decided to send in a trapper to capture and kill the bear. His conventional tricks failed, but then he got smart and set up a gun with a trip wire and the bear inevitably shot himself when he stepped on the wire. The trapper headed back into town with the bear in June. Its fur was ugly, patchy, and completely worthless. It was a shame that the bear was killed this way without anything but its skull to show off in the National Museum. Progress is responsible for the last of the grizzlies being shot, and the narrator wonders who wrote these rules that are destroying the wilderness. It took a long time for the mountain to create its venerable aspect, its community of minor animals and plants, and a grizzly. With one fell swoop, the government trapper took this away and made the Escudilla safe for cows. He didn't know that he "toppled the spire off an edifice a-building since the morning stars sang together." However, it isn't all his fault since he was just doing his job. The Congressmen who passed the bill to raise money to clear the ranges of bears were all sons of pioneers who claimed they were acting to expand the frontier. Little did they know they were actually creating an end to it. "Escudilla still hand on the horizon, but when you see it you no longer think of a bear. It's only a mountain now."



Chapter 16, Chihuahua and Sonora

Chapter 16, Chihuahua and Sonora Summary and Analysis

The physics of beauty is a science that has not been discovered yet. For example, a grouse that lives on an acre is part of the mass or the energy of that acre. If removed, it reduces both mass and energy and has a chain reaction that kills the acre. The unpredictable essence of material things is called the numenon, and the opposite is a phenomenon which is something predictable. The grouse is the numenon of the north woods. The thick-billed parrot, know as the guacamaja to the natives, is the numenon of the Sierra Madre. Anyone who goes to the Sierra Madre is aware of the thick-billed parrot because of its distinct chatter. They circle overhead analyzing everything and everyone that enters into their territory. Obviously, they have not seen hunters or else they would be more cautious about flying so close. This will all end when a road is built through the area, and the hunters come in like conquistadors entering Mexico again.

A person should never return to nature twice because the more beautiful it was when he or she first saw it, the greater chance that it is gone the second time around. The narrator has never gone back to the Delta in Colorado simply because he had such good memories that he doesn't want them to be spoiled. In 1922, he went with his brother and camped on an estuary where the gambel quail roosted nearby. When the sun came out, its rays shone over hundreds of miles of desolation. The river is windy and takes the canoe in many different twists and turns, because it is reluctant to dump into the sea. The two enjoy the scenes, the birds and animals. Sometimes they would see bobcats waiting for a kill, or coyotes that would watch them from inland knolls. By this time, the Delta is probably safe for the cows and is a boring place to be. Freedom from fear has been implemented in the Delta.

The two brothers had everything that they wanted to eat. Geese were abundant, and all the game was good and fat. Camp keeping in the Delta was not that easy as water wasn't abundant. The lagoons were all salty, and the river was too muddy to drink from. They learned how to dig to find sweet water. What they would do was dig a deep hole, then hold their dogs by its hind legs and lower it into the hole. If it drank freely, then they knew they had a good well. They never planned anything for the next day, because they knew that they would get distracted by the wilderness in some way or another. They were free to wander like the river.

They wanted to go from one green lagoon to a greener one that was three hundred yards through a jungle of cachinilla, a tall speak like shrub that grows really thick. They decided against it because going through cachinilla was too dangerous. Since the delta had no place names, it was hard to know where they were exactly. They made up their own, knowing that only they would ever call them that. They felt that they were back in the Pleistocene because of the wildness and the beauty. Now the green lagoons raise cantaloupes, and are no longer as exciting as they once were.



The narrator then travels to the Gavilan River whose water travels so quickly over rocks that it plays a pleasant song. "The life of every river sings its own song," but most songs today are different and discorded because of misuse such as overgrazing, rifles, traps and poison. Parks were created to bring the original music for many people to hear, though getting everyone together in one area to hear the altered music makes it a little more than just noise. There used to be people who could inhabit the river without disrupting its balance. These were the native Americans, but they are gone now.

To the superficial eye, the Gavilan region is hard, stony and full of cliffs and slopes. Its trees are gnarled and its ranges are too steep to put down pasture. Yet terrace building plants knew how to work this land. Many animals live off of oaks, junipers, and wild potatoes. These foods are the way that plants make up the beautiful fauna of the area. The region can also support humans with its deer.

Professors have tried to examine the fauna of the region, which the narrator calls dismembering the wild. Professors serve science, which serves progress. Yet the problem with science is in doubting anything that does not have hard facts. However, this is a problem in itself as the professors have create and alter their own facts that complement their research. One of the most altered facts is that every river needs more people, people need more inventions, which means more science in order for everyone to have a better life and more progress. Science hasn't arrived on the Gavilan yet, the animals are free to live as they should.



Chapter 17, Oregon and Utah and Chapter 18, Manitoba

Chapter 17, Oregon and Utah and Chapter 18, Manitoba Summary and Analysis

This chapter introduces invasive species, or animals and plants that are foreign to the land and have flourished at the expense of the natives species. Ecological stowaways began arriving with the earliest European settlements. They spread faster than the settlers themselves. The biggest problem in the northwestern foothills was cheat grass, or downy chess. Today, the honey colored hills of the northwest mountains are covered by cheat grass, and not by the useful bunchgrass or wheatgrass that used to cover it. The main reason that cheat flourished in the northwest was because of overgrazing. The cattle loved eating wheatgrass and bunchgrass and something needed to cover the bare land. Cheat grows in thick strands, and each stem has a mass of prickly awns that makes the plant inedible for the livestock. With fires, the sagebrush and bitterbrush are being pushed back to higher altitudes, while the cheat survives. Cheat has other problems such as invading old alfalfa fields and degrading hay. Cheat is good for one thing and that is to stop overgrazing that causes erosion. It is thus accepted as a necessary evil.

The narrator starts out by stating that "education...is learning to see one thing by going blind to another." One thing that people have gone blind to is the quality of marshes. All of the marshes in the U.S. are moving northward to Canada where they are better protected. The grebe is one of the main birds that makes the marshland its home and is unaware of its fate.



Chapter 19, Conservation Esthetic

Chapter 19, Conservation Esthetic Summary and Analysis

It is a good thing for people to return to nature, but finding a way to do this without destroying nature is the difficult part. Recreation became a problem during Roosevelt's time when railroads began taking the city people into the country. The automobile made this even worse as people were now easily venturing into areas that were once wild. Bureaus built more roads that went into the hinterlands, the gadget industry then started to invent all kinds of new things to pad the roughness of danger such as tents, sleeping bags, lanterns and portable stoves. Recreation has become a self destructive process of seeking the main problem with modern society. It is a place to escape. Outdoor recreation is the latest model of this.

There are different types of outdoor recreationists. One type will go to a duck marsh with forty other cars parked around the same marsh, and they all stand around and wait for the ducks to fly out so they can shoot them. A second type is the kind that wanders in the woods searching for rare plants and birds. A third type is another nature lover that writes bad poetry about trees and does so by driving across the country from one nature park to another. The final is the professional organization that acts like a travel agency trying to give people the nature experience that they want.

Recreation is an economic resource for the government and also has an ethical component to it. There are "outdoor manners" that are taught at an early age through classes or groups like the boy scouts. People seek nature as they get pleasure out of it. Public policies are controversial as people can't agree with what should be done about nature and how it should be enjoyed. For example, a game farmer kills hawks, and a bird lover wants to protect them. Both love the hawk, and both want to interact with it in a different way. Therefore, there are five different components of the recreational process. The first component is the physical object that an outdoorsman seeks, wants to capture, and take away such as fish, game, and other symbols of achievement such as antlers, heads, or even photographs. These are all trophies. Trophies also have different levels of status. For example, a wild trout is much more valued than a farm raised trout. When there are many people that want to hunt or fish the same thing, then there is a mass-use problem as the natural stock becomes decreased. Mass use decreases the quality of the trophies and induces damage to other resources that depend on the trophy that people seek.

The second component is the feeling of isolation in nature. People seek a scarcity value where they feel special when they experience something that very few others have experienced. There are areas within parks that do not have roads on purpose in order to retain some places that aren't as easily accessible to everyone in order to give that isolation feeling to people that want to venture out. The scarcity of these wild places tends to defeat their own purpose, however, because of marketing and mass advertising



that campaigns for the "wilderness." The third is the "fresh-air" and "change-of-scene" component. Mass use does not affect this value in any way as everyone breathes the same in the wild, and more people don't affect the quality of it. It is like a photographic trophy in that it holds up against mass use. It is in contrast to the isolation component.

The fourth component is evolution and ecology, or nature study. This is the perception of the natural occurrences that the land and living things in the wild have gone through and the way they survive. This component does involve any consumption or dilution of the resource since it is solely the way that a person perceives something, and that is completely personal and is different with each person. It cannot be bought, it is shaped by personal experiences, and anyone can have it. The fifth and final component is the sense of husbandry or farming. Foresters and game managers are willing to pay for farming rather than being paid to do it because of the enjoyment that people get out of it.

The development of each person repeats evolutionary history where the trophy hunter is just the caveman reborn. The problem with the modern picture of the trophy hunter is if the person never grows up or develops the components of isolation, perception and husbandry, because they he will continue to kill and hunt mercilessly forever. What people need to do who are a part of recreational development is to build receptivity into peoples minds and make them want to protect nature and appreciate without the roads that damage it.



Chapter 20, Wildlife in American Culture

Chapter 20, Wildlife in American Culture Summary and Analysis

In modern society, people have shifted from living in nature as the plains Indians had done, though people still retain their wild roots. There are three different values that people have when it comes to nature. The first is personal experience or the split-rail value. This is anything that reminds a person about his or her national origins and evolution. An example is when a boy scout tans a coonskin cap then goes out hunting as Daniel Boone used to do. He is reenacting history. The second is anything that reminds us of our dependency on the old food chain. Civilization has changed all this, because we can just go to the store and get whatever we want, regardless of where it is on the chain and how hard it used to be to get it. People don't even know how their food got on the table anymore because of all the middlemen involved such as farmers, manufacturers, packers, etc. The third is sportsmanship. Sportsmanship is aimed at getting rid of all the gadgets that make it unnecessary to have any skill at all. Sportsmanship is supposed to increase a person's skill and reduce the need for unnecessary gadgets. It is also following the rules of nature voluntarily as disregard for the ethical code will be bad in the long run.

The pioneer period created two different ideas that are part of the split-rail value which are the "go-light" idea and the "one-bullet-one-buck" idea. The first happened naturally in the past as people didn't have the technology and gadgetry to go out, hunt, transport, and store fifty deer in a day. They went light, because they had to. The same goes for the one second idea. These ideas were forced on people. Later on, they became the code of sportsmanship to make sure that the sport of hunting continued as long as possible. Along came the gadgeteer who created a bunch of different contraptions that made it easier for people to hunt. A person didn't have to be the best marksman anymore, because he had a scope that made it easier to see where to place the gun for the best shot. The most extreme case is with the duck hunter who now sits comfortable in a steel boat behind a bunch of duck decoys with canned heat next to him so he doesn't have to endure the cold. The decoys work, and a flock comes in. He shoots at it with super-Z shells that kill more than a few ducks. He has lost sense of the go-light and the one bullet tradition in one shot of his gun.

Not all sports have become as corrupt as duck hunting. Some people have returned to bow and arrow hunting to try to preserve cultural traditions. Yet the American sportsman is definitely puzzled due to the excessive mechanization of hunting that really just moves the factory into the woods and marsh with him. There aren't any leaders to tell the sportsman what is wrong or right, just the industry telling him how to optimize his hunting. Wildlife administrators are too busy figuring out what to shoot at rather than paying attention to the cultural value of shooting. There are some aspects of hunting that cannot be mechanized and altered such as fox hunting with hounds. A person has



no other option rather than to train the hound himself. This takes extraordinary skill. The hound is only as good as his trainer, and the gadget industry cannot tamper with the hounds nose, speed, or hunting style.

Not all of the blame can be placed on the gadget industry. Tourism and the advertising industries add to the deprivation of nature. Their sole purpose is to get people to go out into the woods and do woods-like things. The narrator calls this the "where-to-go" department. Advertisers send hoards of people to the same spot telling them it has the best fishing, hunting, bird watching etc. When the "where-to-go" spots fail, advertisers resort to forcible means such as fishing lotteries. Fish are tagged and artificially placed in the lake so when a fisherman catches one of them, they get a prize by the advertisers. This only adds to the deprivation of the fish, but it makes the Chamber of Commerce really happy. Wildlife managers also try to raise game in the wild by manipulating the environment. They get rid of the apex predators, or the predators that are the top of the food chain like wolves and cougars. This increases the amount of game animals like deer and elk which is good for the hunters, but bad for the land. The animals will eventually overgraze the areas they live in, then die of malnutrition and hunger. The land is left overgrazed and prone to erosion.

There has been a good sport for wildlife and that is wildlife research. Researchers are special people that know that the environment is so complex that they will never be able to fully understand all of its complexities. Yet they study it anyway, because they know that the sport in researching is learning about the unknown. Wildlife once fed people and shaped culture and still is a great way to pass time even if people don't understand how to reap the greatest benefit from it. What people need to do is reap its benefits by using modern mentality and learning about nature before setting out and ruining it.

Chapter 21, Wilderness

Chapter 21, Wilderness Summary and Analysis

Wilderness was the raw material that man used to create civilization. It has always been very diverse in matter which is why no two civilizations are exactly alike. There are two problems that humans face. First is the exhaustion of the wilderness. Second is the world wide hybridization of human culture from industrialization and modern transport, also known as globalization. Neither of these things can be prevented, and they probably shouldn't be because of the advancement of human society that they bring. However, with a little effort, nature can be preserved a little better than it is and can be saved from being lost forever.

There are some things that a person will never be able to see in America again such as the long-grass prairie, the Lake State pineries, and the coastal plain flatwoods. Coastlines are the fastest shrinking wilderness areas as so many people flock to them dumping houses, hotels, and other businesses on them for the ocean views. There is only one part of North America that is formally reserved for wilderness and most of it is in Canada. It is the Quetico-Superior International park in Minnesota and Ontario.

Wilderness for recreation is extremely menacing. Public wilderness areas are a way of taking a person back to a time when they had to use their primitive skills to survive. The most popular means of transportation are canoeing and packing. The value of this type of recreation is the way that it differs from the workday life. It offers a way out of the mundane that people sought after for so long. However, mechanized recreation already takes up about nine-tenths of the woods and mountains and finding real wilderness is extremely difficult.

People have not been able to successfully control the health of the land. Some people believe that when soil loses fertility or when it washes away faster than it forms, then it is sick. This is not true. There are other derangements that people take as fact such as the disappearance of plants and animals due to natural causes, and not because of human intervention. People think that when mice and rabbits increase their population to plague proportions that it is for an unknown reason. They are thus poisoned to control them and get their numbers down again. The different processes that people now call conservation are simply "local alleviations to biotic pain." This just means that people are simply putting a band-aid over a broken bone. People need to start studying land health, which needs to be based on what is normal. Using paleontology, people can learn a lot about what the land used to be like, especially since land doesn't change dramatically overnight. However, some things cannot be saved.

National Parks aren't enough to protect the lives of the larger carnivores. They failed to protect wolves, and the mountain sheep herds are shrinking. The best way to manage national parks is to leave the most wild parts alone and count them as endangered areas that need to recover. Any wilderness program is insufficient to its purpose as

society will never learn about what hurts the environment until the moment for action has passed.



Chapter 22, The Land Ethic

Chapter 22, The Land Ethic Summary and Analysis

The ethical sequence is a process of ecological evolution in itself and has not been studied by anyone except philosophers. An ethic is the difference between social and anti social actions. The first ethics dealt with the relation between people and later they dealt with the relationship between a person and his or her society. While there is the golden rule that tries to explain the persons role in society, and democracy that do the same for the social organization and the individual, there isn't any ethic that deals with a person's relationship to the land and the animals and plants that live on it. The conservation movement is the first step to acknowledging that there is an ecological necessity to establish a code of ethics for the environment and people. The only person to land relation is strictly economic which entails only those privileges that people can gain from land and not their obligation to it. The narrator states that the main premise for ethics and the environment is for each person to acknowledge that they are a member of a community with interdependent parts. The land ethic changes the role of humans from conquerors to members of the community. It implies that each person should respect his and her fellow members and respect the community that they live in.

People have learned that the conquerer role is eventually self defeating. The same happens in the biotic community. The ordinary citizen today assumes that scientists know what makes the environment work, and the scientist knows that he or she does not. They also agree that inner workings will never be known. Scientists do know that the plant succession steered the course of history. In India, there are regions with no sod-forming grass. This is where people have settled themselves, and they go out and bring the grass to the cows instead of vice versa. In Kentucky, nobody knows where the bluegrass came from, but if it were some other plant that people weren't so fond of, would the settlers have fought so hard for the land? Once people learn that land is part of our community, then history will change, and everyone will know what affect the pioneer had on the land.

Conservation is the state of harmony between man and the land. Despite so much propaganda, conservation still moves at a place too slow to really do anything. The only thing that can be done is increase conservation education.

In 1930 people accepted that Wisconsin's topsoil was going bad. In 1933, farmers were told that they had to start doing certain remedial practices for the next five years and that they would get everything they needed plus machinery and materials. Everything went well until the five years was up. The farmers forgot all about the practices since they weren't being economically supported anymore. They only selected to follow the remedial practices that were profitable to them and ignored all the others. The narrator states that "Obligations have no meaning without conscience and the problem that we face is the extension of the social conscience from people to land."



This lack of economic importance is the main weakness for conservation. When a non-economic category, such as a bird or a wild flower, is threatened, it needs to be given some type of economic value in order for people to care about it. That is why so many species go extinct, because we can't tag dollar sign to it and campaign for its protection. This problem is sometimes greater than just a single species and can be an entire ecosystem such as a bog, a marsh, or a sand dune. The uglier and less spectacular the place, the less chance it has to survive in the modern world. Industrial landowners and users are also avoiding the issue of conservation arguing that they lose money from it. The irony is that if they don't invest in conservation, then they won't have anything to live off of in the future. If lumbermen cut down all the trees, then they are out of business. Basing conservation solely on economics is a losing battle. It ignores the main issue which is getting the environment to function at a healthy level. It also gives the government issues that are too complex to handle. The only thing that can be done is for private owners to engage in visible remedies for weak land, and nothing else.

There are problems with how conservation is taught. The "balance of nature" way of explaining things is flawed and should be taught as a biotic pyramid instead of a balancing scale. For every carnivore, there are hundreds of his own prey which have eaten thousands of their smaller prey, which have eaten millions of insects, which have feasted on an uncountable amount of plants. This basic food chain falls into the pyramid. Evolution has made the pyramid more complex with different animals eating both meat and plants for optimum survival. Land isn't just soil but the support for these food chains and the fountain of natural energy. The native plants and animals keep the energy circuit open and moving freely. Man made changes are not evolutionary changes and have more effects on the land energy than anything else. This brings up the questions of whether land can self adjust to man and his changes, and whether man's desired changes can be created with less damage to the land. It is improbable that people will ever know the answer to this question though the less violent the man made changes are, then the greater the chance is that the pyramid will be able to recover from the changes. The level of violence on the land is directly related to the population density of the land. Therefore, North America has a better chance of recovery than Europe as it is less populated, younger, and conservation knowledge is becoming more popular.

There is disagreement about land health even amongst conservation scientists. The A group sees land as soil with a commodity-production function, meaning the soil is meant to produce something that can be extracted. The B group sees land as a biota or as an ecosystem in itself with a function much greater than simply growing plants. Where group A would see forestry as simply growing trees for lumber, group B sees growing trees as creating complex ecosystems for different animals and insects to live in and off of. Group B is the one that has the ecological conscience. In both these cleavages, there is the main problem of man the conquerer versus man the biotic citizen. There is no way that an ethical relation to land can exist without sincere love and admiration for the land. The most serious problem is that the educational and economic systems are moving away from land consciousness. The evolution of land ethic is an emotional process and an intellectual one, as well. Everything that has helped human progress is

harming the land. However, things can change as long as attitudes change, and the use of land becomes more objective and gentle to support .



Characters

Aldo Leopold, Narrator

This is the most important character of the book. Aldo is a person who loves and respects nature and is saddened by the way nature has been ousted by progress in the modern society. His main purpose is to show people through his words how wonderful nature is and how many great memories he has attained throughout the course of his young life. He does a great job at describing the way nature works and how he has seen it. He introduces the reader to animals and plants that are rare and have not been made popular by mass consumption.

Most of the plants he talks about only live in graveyards, because these are the only places they are not tampered with. He respects hunting and knows how to do it traditionally with just himself, his gun, and the animal he is tracking down. It is all about the fight and the story, and not about how quickly he got the animal and the new gadgetry that he just tried out. He sincerely loves nature and hunting and believes it is a shame that hunting has become so mechanical these days. He believes that progress and its main objective of making life easier for people to live in is the biggest problem that nature faces, because people want to live easy boring lives. He believes that wildlife management is solely about economics and that it has harmed nature more than helped it.

Dog

Aldo's dog is the second most important character because of the time that they spend together hunting. The first part of the book is filled with the two of them going on excursions and hunting animals. His dog is very specially trained and knows the different scents of the animals in the area. In one chapter, the narrator talks about how patient his dog is with him. He feels like he is the student, and the dog is the teacher. The dog hears a sound, points or cues the narrator to where the animal is. If the narrator is lucky, he makes the kill. More often than not, he misses, and the dog turns to him and gives him a look. Then he moves on to continue his teaching. The dog has a different cue for every animal that he senses. If he senses a rabbit, he acts jovially and lets the narrator know that it is not what they are looking for. He is always more serious when they come across a duck or a grouse since that is what the training has been all about. It is a really endearing relationship that they have. It adds to the personal nature of the first part of the book.

Two Young men

Two college age men went to the Flambeau river for their last chance of freedom before entering into the service.



Passenger Pigeon

The passenger pigeon is extinct, and people can only learn about it from books and museums.

Wildlife Managers

Wildlife Managers are in charge of taking care of national parks. Their goal is to create policies that protect the animals and plants in a park. They have not been successful in any park yet, since they don't have the adequate scientific background to really determine what is the best thing to do for the animals. They think it terms of what will be best for the animals in terms of human use.

Grizzly Bear

The Grizzly bear was the majestic bear that lived atop the Escudilla mountain. It was killed so that people could enter into the mountain pass safely.

Scientists

Scientists do their best to try and discover the way that nature works. They are probably the only ones that understand that their knowledge is limited and that they will never be able to learn everything there is to know about the way land works.

Professors

A professor's job is to serve science that serves progress. Professors tend to alter and create their own facts to make sure that it complements their own research. There is much competition amongst professors so it is necessary to prove all of their theories regardless of how far off they may be.

Woodcock

The Woodcock is a wonderful bird that puts on a very special mating dance. It has short legs and does its dance out in the open so that it can dance around comfortably.

Chickadee 65290

Chickadee number 65290 was one of 7 birds that was banded in 1937 by the narrator. In the next five years, chickadee 65290 was the only survivor of his group.



Aldo's Brother

Aldo's brother is introduced only once in the book during their trip down the Gavilan river. They had a great time and lived off the land easily because of the abundance of plants and geese.

Cranes

The likability of cranes is high amongst people in Wisconsin, and their appreciation increases as people study its history. Aldo is very fond of cranes and speaks highly of them throughout the book. The most special places have cranes in them as they have adapted to live in places where their livelihood was constantly challenged.

Wolf

The wolf was always very respected in the natural community. Animals knew to shudder and hide at the first sound of its howl. They ruled the forests until people came in and started to control their populations, eventually killing them off in most national parks.



Objects/Places

Aldo Leopold's Farm appears in non-fiction

The first half of the book takes place near Aldo's farm. He talks about what goes on in his property and why he is blessed to have it. He doesn't follow all of the advice that the university gives. He doesn't take out the cottonwoods, because they are a pain. He liked having diseased trees on his property, because they bring more animals to his land. When he writes about his property, it is magical in a sense and he gets up early to record the first sounds that he hears on his land. He and the dog know every inch of his acreage, and before nine, he is free to travel throughout all the acreage that goes past his own borders.

Sand Counties appears in non-fiction

Sand Counties are another area of Wisconsin that the narrator has a deep love for. The social planners saw beauty in the Sand Counties too, but for building reasons only. The narrator bought a sand farm in the 1930's as did many people during this time. The narrator finds that the sand farms aren't as poor as people originally led on, because there are a myriad of plant species that grow in the sand. In April, the pasque-flowers bloom on every gravelly ridge, and the sandwort comes out with its white bloom on the poorest of hilltops just before the lupine lets out its blue blooms.

Gavilan River appears in non-fiction

The water of the Gavilan River travels so quickly over rocks that it plays a pleasant song. "The life of every river sings its own song," but most songs today are different and discorded because of misuse such as overgrazing, rifles, traps and poison. There used to be people who could inhabit the river without disrupting its balance. These were the native Americans, but they are gone now.

Flambeau appears in non-fiction

The Flambeau is a river in Wisconsin where Aldo's father used to go and where Aldo met two college boys leaving for the military. He says that if Paul Bunyan was interested in learning about posterity that he would have asked to go to the Flambeau.

Escudilla appears in non-fiction

Escudilla is a majestic mountain that can be seen wherever a person stands in the area. A grizzly bear used to live atop it but was killed to make it safe for humans to travel to the top.



Pine appears in non-fiction

The pine is the narrator's favorite tree, because it stays green year round.

Bur Oak appears in non-fiction

A very strong oak tree, the bur oak would have covered all of Wisconsin had it not been for natural fires. Its bark is thick enough to withstand being chewed on by rabbits and mice.

Chinese Elm appears in non-fiction

The tree that scientists at the university have chosen to replace the cottonwood is the Chinese Elm. It is preferable, because it does not leave cotton on people's window screens.

Cottonwood appears in non-fiction

The Cottonwood is part of the native environment that is not favored by people, because it leaves cotton on window screens and is hard to clean.

Roads appear in non-fiction

Roads are taking over nature by taking away their natural and wild aspects. They are part of the recreation policy that make it easier for people to get into nature.

Recreation parks appear in non-fiction

Recreation parks are reserved for people to go see what the wilderness is like. They are created and controlled by bureaucrats that haven't studied nature and are only concerned with the economic aspect of the parks.

Alder Creek appears in non-fiction

Alder Creek is where Aldo went to fish for trout. His love for the fishing game led him to fly fish downstream, something that isn't usually done, and he caught three fish.

Colorado Delta appears in non-fiction

The Colorado Delta is a windy river with twists and turns. There are lots of animals and plant life all around. Aldo and his brother travel on the river by canoe.



Themes

Freedom of the Atom in Nature

The atom in nature used to be free to roam about as it pleased. This is no longer the case. Now it is subjected to restraints and boundaries that are completely unnatural. Yet, are these boundaries enough to truly constrain the atom? An atom leaves a group of rocks where it has been laying for a couple thousands of years, then it goes into the soil and is absorbed by a plant. It moves to the leaf and is eaten by a deer who is then shot by a person and is eaten by them. Afterwards, the person dies, and the atom goes back into the soil. Perhaps, it seeps into the groundwater and is then poured into a cup by a teenager who drinks the water. It has thus entered a house which is a natural boundary against nature. The teen sneezes and the atom is sprayed out into the air. It attaches itself to the family dog and then leaves the house again. The atom ends up back in nature, though behind a white picket fence. It won't be that hard for it to escape the unnatural boundary. It can be caught by a bird who is later eaten by a cat, who dies in the grass. The atom is released into the soil again. Even if it inevitably ends up in the ocean, its life has not ended which is what the narrator states. The atom can be eaten by a fish, who is eaten by a bigger fish, caught and eaten by a person therefore never really ending its journey. Regardless of all of the artificial boundaries that man has put up, the single atom will always be able to roam free. The problem is larger, more complex atoms, such as animals and plants. These are the things that boundaries harm. The more pavement that is put up, the less land a plant has to send its seeds to. The same goes for animals who stay away from pavement, but will and are inevitably surrounded, and confined to smaller environments with less food to go around. Once their journey ends, it is over for good.

Appreciation

People don't appreciate what they don't know or understand. While a person from the city can enjoy wild flowers, he or she doesn't understand how they got there or what the life cycle of the plant is unless they take measures into their own hands and learn about the plants. There are so many different plants in the world that the smallest usually goes unnoticed because it isn't spectacular. People love beautiful flowers with spectacular blooms. The less extraordinary the bloom, the more ordinary the plant and the less people will care if it becomes extinct. This is sad in itself. What if that plant really does have a spectacular bloom, but it only comes around every five years? The problem is that people have short attention spans, and they won't wait around that long when they can have a rose that blooms every year without failing. If the rose does fail, they can go out and buy another plant, or buy a dozen already cut roses for their house. It is usually lesser species of things that suffer, and this will always be the case. Species of plants and animals are going extinct everyday because people don't care about them. In contrast people have the plants and animals that they do care about, to the point where they will actually harm them.



Take, for instance, the game animals in Yellowstone. People loved them as they wanted to hunt them for meat, antlers, and other trophy reasons. Yet they had to get rid of the cougars and wolves in the area in order to optimize the game in the park. When the cougar became extinct, and the wolf was almost completely gone, the deer and elk didn't do so great. Their numbers skyrocketed for a while, but then they became puny and malnourished and started to overgraze the park. They eventually began dying, because there wasn't enough food to go around for all of them. People couldn't kill them as fast as they were being born and dying. Today, people's attention has shifted back towards the wolf in Yellowstone. There are measures in place to protect it from extinction. Yet even this is flawed as the wolf packs are growing too large for the park to support. It is the mirror image of what happened to the game animals.

Modern Hunting

The narrator argues that modern hunting has done away with all morals and ethical values that used to be in place in nature. Before, the hunter used to have great skill and patience when he hunted. He used to crawl through mud and wait for hours in the cold by the lake just for the opportunity to get a shot at a duck that might or might not come. It was the thrill of the chase that excited people and not how fast a person could kill twenty ducks. Now a duck hunter waits in a heated motor boat with duck call contraptions and duck decoys that lure the ducks to him. With one blast of the shot gun, he can kill more ducks than he can take back to camp with him, leaving some food for the scavengers around the lake. It takes him only a few hours to do what it used to take much longer. Modern gadgets really just even the playing field as people don't need to be as skilled anymore. They don't even have to be really great marksmen anymore, because they are using multiple bullets with one blast instead of the single bullet as it was before. Morality has left hunting. Though people in the past didn't have a higher sense of morality, they just didn't have the technology to overcome it as the modern people have. They killed with one bullet, because they had no other choice. They killed one deer at a time as they couldn't carry more than that to their camp site. There are many native people today that say they would use more of the land and hunt more if they only had the technology to do so. They don't live backwards because they want to.

Style

Perspective

Aldo Leopold is the writer and narrator of the book. He has devoted his life to seeing everything that he could in the wilderness before progress came along and began stripping the wilderness of its wild and natural aspects. He writes the book to educate people about how things used to be, and how they are being changed. Nature is being controlled so that people can have better, more comfortable lives.

Tone

The tone of this book is very poetic and moving. The first part of the book is all about the narrator's experiences. He talks about them so eloquently that the reader wishes he or she were there with him. It is also very serious at times which he does on purpose to remind the reader that even though he has experienced many wonderful things in nature, they don't exist anymore because of modernization and progress. It is depressing at times because the reader grows this desire to go duck hunting, for example, but then reads that there aren't that many ducks left in certain areas that used to be great to hunt at. Then he introduces modern hunting and the readers' desire to hunt is decreased, because he or she may not have ever hunted and the modern way seems to be so wrong. It then sends a sense of urgency to help wildlife researchers learn more about nature so that the little that does exist isn't completely erased from the face of the earth. It is a very intense and wonderfully written book that attempts to call people to action and think beyond what politicians and national bureaus are putting out there. It is also a little anti academic because he argues that professors are only concerned with their own research and not that of anyone else's. They in turn end up in a bubble and nature is not about being in a bubble separate from society, rather it is what society used to be made up of, and should have remained so. Progress was and is the problem, and only people can alter it so that nature isn't completely erased and paved over.

Structure

The book is written in a very special way to grab the attention of the reader and get him or her hooked into the subject matter. The first part is organized by months of the year and the different things that happen on the narrators land during those months from the birth of young rabbits, to muskrats peeking their heads out cautiously to avoid the hawk that looms overhead. Everything is in a balance. It is completely by chance that an animal gets a meal. He talks about the beauty of nature and how it is being compromised by the bureaucrats that don't understand what nature is all about. The second part of the book is divided into chapter by places that the narrator has visited. He always makes a point to say that he has never gone back to any of the places,



because he knows that they are completely changed and will never be the same. When he talks about the Escudilla mountain, he always remembers the great grizzly bear that used to live there. Then the bear was killed so that people could ascend the mountain safely and the mountain is no longer spectacular. This section places more emphasis on the negative side of progress and how it is the main enemy that nature has. People believe that progress in the states is getting rid of dangers and obstacles that make their daily lives harder. Their main goal is to have a seamless and boring life. The third part of the book brings in all of Aldo Leopold's theories and scientific background.



Quotes

"Tell me of what plant-birthday a man takes notice, and I shall tell you a good deal about his vocation, his hobbies, his hay fever, and the general level of his ecological education." Chapter 7, pg. 44

"It is a river who wields the brush, and it is the same river who...erases it forever from human view. After that it exists only in my mind's eye." Chapter 8, pg. 51

Almost anything can happen between one red lantern and another." Chapter 10 pg. 65

"Whoever owns land has thus assumed, whether he knows it or not, the divine functions of creating and destroying plants." Chapter 11 pg. 67

"A conservationist is one who is humbly aware that with each stroke he is writing his signature on the face of his land." Chapter 11, pg. 68

"I now suspect that just as a deer herd lives in mortal fear of its wolves, so does a mountain live in mortal fear of its deer." Chapter 15 pg. 132

In wildness is the salvation of the world. Perhaps this is the hidden meaning in the howl of the world, long known among mountains, but seldom perceived among men." Chapter 15, pg. 133

"Escudilla still hand on the horizon, but when you see it you no longer think of a bear. It's only a mountain now." Chapter 15, pg. 136

"It is the part of wisdom near to revisit a wilderness, for the more golden the lily, the more certain that someone has gilded it." Chapter 16, pg. 141

Man always kills the thing he loves, and so we the pioneers have killed our wilderness. Chapter 16 pg. 148

"Wilderness is the raw material out of which man has hammered the artifact called civilization." Chapter 21, pg. 188

"Relegating grizzlies to Alaska is about like relegating happiness to heaven; one may never get there." Chapter 21 pg. 199

"It is only the scholar who appreciates that all history consists of successive excursions from a single starting-point, to which man returns again and again to organize yet another search for a durable scale of values." Chapter 21 pg. 200



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the connection between generational conservation and what it means to one member of a generation versus another.

How does conservation compare today with the views of the narrator? Are his views outdated?

Compare and contrast the conservation of a native tree compared to that of a foreign tree that has been around for at least a century. Should we get rid of newer trees and plant the originals?

Scientists in this day were most concerned with progress. Can progress be defined in the same way as it was then?

Are hunters who use mechanized gadgets really wrong for doing so? What if this is the only way they can enjoy nature, because they simply aren't naturally good hunters?

Some fish have become so aware of gadgets that they avoid them, and have evolved to recognize certain lures and smells. If people were to return to using flies and other natural lures, would the fish even bite or have they evolved past these tricks as well?

Discuss some ways that people can be educated about conservation and land management on the local and individual level and how those things could have a trickle up effect.