

Watershed or Vineyards?

For a greater understanding of environmental philosophy and ethical decision-making.

I. *A Sand County Almanac*, a philosophy about land, an argument for 'voluntary decency'.

Briefly: [A Sand County Almanac](#) and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* stand alone as the two most venerated and significant environmental books of the 20th century. *A Sand County Almanac* is a 1949 non-fiction book by American ecologist, forester, and environmentalist Aldo Leopold. The collection of essays advocate Leopold's idea of a "land ethic", or a responsible relationship existing between people and the land they inhabit.

Leopold also rails against the way that policy makers need to find an economic motive for conservation. In "The Ecological Conscience" section, he wrote: "Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land." He believed that land is not a commodity to be possessed; rather, humans must have mutual respect for Earth in order not to destroy it. He also puts forth the idea that humans will never be free if they have no wild spaces in which to roam.

Aldo Leopold's Environmental Land Ethic:

Aldo Leopold proposes that the next step in the evolution of ethics is the expansion of ethics to include nonhuman members of the biotic community, collectively referred to as "the land." Leopold states the basic principle of his land ethic as, "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

He also describes it in this way: "The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land . . . [A] land ethic changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such."

Competing philosophies about land:

- Economics based land ethic: Land is valuable if it has an economic value to humans.
- Utilitarian based land ethic: Land is valuable if it has a function for people.
- Libertarian based land ethic: Land is valuable if it provides value of any sort primarily to its owner, an ethic based upon self-interest, good or bad.
- Egalitarian based land ethic: Land is valuable to everyone and all should have equal access or entitlement to land and/or access to food.

II. [The Natural Capital Project](#), a Stanford-based cadre of economists, biologists and software engineers whose work meets at the increasingly crowded intersection of ecology, technology and finance. NatCap was founded in 2005 in order to tackle the very quandary faced by West Coast Aquatic — how to juggle clashing human and natural values. To clear up such dilemmas, NatCap's scientists use their diverse talents to consider a question that seems simple but is actually bafflingly complex: What is nature worth?

III. [The Markkula Center for Applied Ethics](#). Resources for analyzing real-world ethical issues and tools to address them. Download [this app](#) for ethical decision-making.