

# ALDO LEOPOLD'S LAND ETHIC: IMPLICATIONS FOR PREDATOR MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: The golden rule of Aldo Leopold's land ethic clearly supports active management of predators that harm populations of rare animal species. In the early part of his career, while working as a forester in the American Southwest, Leopold advocated exterminating large predators like gray wolves (*Canis lupus lupus*) and grizzly bears (*Ursus arctos horribilis*) from the region, but he later changed his mind when he realized that native predators help maintain ecosystem integrity. Philosophically, Leopold's changing views on predators exemplifies John Dewey's customary and reflective morality. But Leopold's dramatic narrative in *A Sand County Almanac* about his regret for helping kill a female wolf with pups on the Apache National Forest in 1909 should not be misinterpreted to mean he condemned all predator management as environmentally wrong. On the contrary, today, in some situations, the ecosystem integrity Leopold valued actually may be dependent upon active management of certain predator species. And, in some cases, lethal control may be the best option. I examine situations involving rare species that are harmed by predators in which the land ethic's golden rule (i.e., "A thing is right only when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the community, and the community includes the soil, waters, fauna and flora, as well as people") mandates predator management. I explain why "letting nature take its course" is not a desirable option, and maintain that, in such cases, the predator management polemic should be focused on how management should proceed rather than on whether it should proceed.

Key Words: Aldo Leopold, ecosystem integrity, land ethic, predator control, predator management

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