From Conquest to Harmony: An Open Letter to FWC Chairman Brian Yablonski

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Two years ago, animal lovers across the globe were shocked and appalled by your agency's premeditated slaughter of over 300 Florida black bears. The 2015 bear hunt was a watershed event in our state's conservation history, creating an entirely new class of citizen-activists and exposing the undemocratic, unscientific, and grossly immoral character of wildlife "management" to millions of people. Crucially, it also presented an opportunity for you and your agency to reconsider the way in which you practice your profession. While we welcomed your vote earlier this year to refrain from holding further hunts until a new Bear Management Plan has been written and approved, we have been disappointed by your renewed emphasis on the centrality of hunting in the FWC's approach to conservation. We fear that the opportunity for institutional evolution is being missed, thereby setting the stage for many more years of conflict between the non-hunting general public and the ostensible trustees of the public's wildlife. For you must be under no illusions, Mr. Chairman: we have not forgotten; we have not forgiven; and we are not going away, until conservation becomes about harmony, not harvests.

Sadly, missing opportunities for institutional growth seems to have become a venerable tradition in your profession. Long before the 2015 Florida bear hunt, American conservation history offered clear directions toward a form of conservation that respected all human stakeholders and, more importantly, placed the needs of our flora and fauna ahead of the wants of "consumptive users." At this time of remembrance, therefore, let us examine perhaps the greatest of all these missed opportunities – the failure to fully comprehend the legacy of the father of your own institution, Aldo Leopold. At first blush, you might find it surprising that we should appeal to such a figure; after all, you invoked his participation in hunting to bolster your thesis in *The Hunter-Conservationist Paradox*. But Leopold was a man of singular depth and complexity, and deserves closer scrutiny than a short press release permits. And we need him now more than ever.

What's Love Got to Do with It?

In 1922, toward the end of his tenure as Assistant Director of Operations in the U.S. Forest Service's Southwest District, Aldo Leopold submitted his plan to designate the Gila National Forest (in what is now New Mexico) as a wilderness area. Approved two years later, the plan was revolutionary within the Forest Service, testifying to Leopold's boldness in confronting bureaucratic dogmas and linking him to a tradition of wilderness

preservation stretching back to John Muir (and his under-appreciated allies) and forward to the Wilderness Act of 1964. After this effort, he surely deserved a break, and set off with his brother Carl on a three-week hunting and camping trip in the Colorado River Delta. He did not write about the experience until 1945, fearing the pain of knowing that his memories could never be duplicated. Included as *The Green Lagoons* in the second part of his most famous work, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*, first published posthumously in 1949, the piece can fairly be described as rhapsodic:

> When the sun peeped over the Sierra Madre, it slanted across a hundred miles of lovely desolation, a vast flat bowl of wilderness rimmed by jagged peaks. On the map the Delta was bisected by the river, but in fact the river was nowhere and everywhere, for he could not decide which of a hundred green lagoons offered the most pleasant and least speedy path to the Gulf. So he traveled them all, and so did we. He divided and rejoined, he twisted and turned, he dallied with lovely groves, he got lost and was glad of it, and so were we. For the last word in procrastination, go travel with a river reluctant to lose his freedom in the sea.
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> 'He leadeth me by still waters' was to us only a phrase in a book until we had nosed our canoe through the green lagoons. If David had not written the psalm, we should have felt constrained to write our own. (125)

This is what the Colorado River Delta (which once covered 3,000 square miles, not just 100) looks like today (image courtesy of the Nature Conservancy):

With the exception of a few trickles released by its American masters upstream, the Colorado River has not flowed to the sea since 1960 (The Nature Conservancy, *The Colorado River Delta*). The river – and note how Leopold *personified* the river – is dead. The incredible richness of the Delta's wildlife has been spent, by a technological society that decided it had a better use for the water, assuming, with its characteristic human arrogance, that the river itself (or, should we say, himself?) had no good use for it. The fearsome character described by Leopold as "the despot of the Delta, the great jaguar, *el tigre*" (126) had no *rights* to the water. Nor did the fish, the fowl, the plants, or even the Gulf of California. They were not *stakeholders*.

While we do not expect you to concern yourself with how the loss of his domain made *el tigre* feel, it does not seem unreasonable to ask you to imagine how this picture would have made Aldo Leopold feel. In the concluding paragraphs of his essay, he sounded a plaintive note very similar to that struck in *Marshland Elegy*, which earlier in the *Almanac* celebrated the "paleontological patent of nobility" belonging to cranes (86). (At the time, he believed the Delta had been converted to melon fields; the worst was yet to come.)

> Far beyond him [a soaring buzzard] the sky suddenly exhibited a rotating circle of white spots, alternately visible and invisible. A faint bugle note soon told us they were cranes, inspecting their Delta and finding it good. At the time my ornithology was homemade, and I was pleased to think them whooping cranes because they were so white. Doubtless they were sandhill cranes, but it doesn't matter. What matters is that we were sharing our wilderness with the wildest of living fowl. We and they had found a common home in the remote fastnesses of space and time; we were both back in the Pleistocene. Had we been able to, we would have bugled back their greeting. Now, from the far reaches of the years, I see them wheeling still.
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> Man always kills the thing he loves, and so we the pioneers have killed our wilderness. Some say we had to. Be that as it may, I am glad I shall never be young without wild country to be young in. Of what avail are forty freedoms without a blank spot on the map? (130)

Now, before anyone is tempted to say that the death of the Colorado Delta is not our problem, not our fault, and not in our jurisdiction, let us imagine ourselves, if we dare, a few decades into our own future. Looking back across "the far reaches of the years," how will we remember the Florida Everglades, the Sacramento River Delta, the few remaining old-growth forests of the Pacific Northwest, and the grizzly bears of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, which we are told have "recovered" even though they number barely 700 and occupy a mere 2% of their original range? (Would we regard

ourselves as “recovered” if, after some great calamity, we occupied only 2% of our original range? Would we like to be hunted to keep our population at a “healthy” level in such circumstances?) Are we going to keep killing the things we love? Are we going to use them all up until, in one of Leopold's favorite phrases, we “die of our own too much”? If current behavior continues, the answer is unbearably obvious.

Several observations are in order here. First, we have been told over and over again, particularly by members of your Commission who are most eager to engage in “lethal management,” that policy-making must not be guided by emotion. (Strangely, we do not hear those exhortations aimed at hunters, or indeed agency personnel, who deploy the most basic of all emotions – fear – when making their case.) Yet if there is one thing that rises above all others in Leopold's life and work, it is that Leopold *loved* the land. He *loved* wildlife. He *loved* the natural world. And while he led the effort to apply science to the task of wildlife management, he knew that science, without ethics, could all too easily devolve into the handmaiden of technological destruction. In *The Land Ethic*, the concluding and most famous chapter of the *Almanac*, Leopold identifies an “A-B cleavage” between those who see the natural world as a source of commodities with economic value, and those who see it much more broadly as a biotic community, with many values that are not yet fully understood, and may never be. (Note that Leopold used the term 'land' as a typically pithy and evocative reference to the biotic community broadly understood, including soil, water, plants, and animals.)

> In all of these cleavages, we see repeated the same basic paradoxes: man the conqueror *versus* man the biotic citizen; science the sharpener of his sword *versus* science the searchlight on his universe; land the slave and servant *versus* land the collective organism....
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> It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value. By value, of course, I mean something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophical sense. (186-187)

We are never going to apologize for loving the natural world, and we will remain highly suspicious of those who tell us that our emotions should have no bearing on policy, especially when those masquerading as impartial guardians of the public weal have vested economic interests in converting wildlife habitat to “better uses.”

Second, we have also been told over and over again that the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (“the Model”) is the greatest conservation system ever devised by the mind of man – unique in all the world, and responsible for a glittering array of “success stories.” We are cognizant of the fact that several aspects of the Model can

trace their lineage back to Aldo Leopold's American Game Policy of 1930, and that hunter-centric wildlife managers long relied upon his classic text, *Game Management* (1933). We shall return to these linkages later. For present purposes, there are two fundamental points that need to be made, over and above the growing body of literature faulting the Model for violating the broad-based, democratic implications of the Public Trust Doctrine; ignoring the vital contributions (past and present) of non-hunters in American conservation history; and for so obviously attempting to dominate the landscape of ideas in the service of special interests (Treves *et al., Predators and the Public Trust*; Nelson *et al*., *An Inadequate Construct?*; Feldpausch-Parker, Parker, and Vidon, *Privileging Consumptive Use*). The first point is that the fate of the Colorado River Delta should focus attention on the tenet of the Model that describes wildlife as "an international resource." It seems only fair to ask, what use was the Model in protecting the rich wildlife of the Colorado Delta? How did this *ne plus ultra* of conservation systems perform in the real world beyond the pages of agency pdfs, far away from the tramping grounds of your clients?

Is this catastrophe for wildlife in Mexico to be offset, in some cold utilitarian calculus, by the satisfaction of license-buying hunters with their deer and turkey harvests in wildlife management units north of the border? If hunters, as you like to say, "pay for conservation," in what way are they paying to restore the damage done to the Delta? Are we supposed to tell ourselves that hunters' Duck Stamps provided a good new home in American wildlife refuges for the cranes who could no longer find their Delta? (Are you ever going to acknowledge that most of the land in the National Wildlife Refuge System, and most conservation land in general, has actually been paid for by the public, not by hunters? (Smith and Molde, *Wildlife Conservation and Management Funding in the U.S.*)) The reality we must confront is that the destruction of Aldo Leopold's green lagoons was a result of the consumptive behavior of the United States, whose citizens have allocated to themselves over 100% of the water in the river (U.S. Dept. of Interior, *Colorado River Basin Water Supply and Demand Study*). The twists and turns of the Delta, and the myriad of wonderful natural processes it supported, have been supplanted by the twists and turns of man's Law of the River. (The government apparently perceives no irony in capitalizing those words, and feels no compulsion to explain its conceit to the erstwhile despot of the Delta, *el tigre*, whose own laws no longer matter.) In theory, the Model's "seven sisters" could have addressed these destructive activities, yet they stood off to the side and allowed "progress" to march on. As a conservation system – assuming, of course, that "conservation" has at least something to do with protecting wildlife and wild places – the Model failed. Miserably. Unfortunately, however, as we shall discuss in the next section of this letter, the meaning of "failure" (and "success") is determined by those defining the meaning of "conservation."

And this leads directly to a second, overarching conclusion: whatever else might be said

about the Model, it is a *completely inadequate societal response to the conservation challenges we face today*. In 1930, Leopold and his colleagues on the Game Policy Committee of the American Game Conference saw the impending demise of game species as a real crisis. They were not wrong. But in 2017, we face a much graver crisis, as Edward O. Wilson has explained:

> No comfort should be drawn from the spurious belief that because extinction is a natural process, humans are merely another Darwinian agent. The rate of extinction is now about 400 times that recorded through recent geological time and is accelerating rapidly. Under the best of conditions, the reduction of diversity seems destined to approach that of the great natural catastrophes at the end of the Paleozoic and Mesozoic Eras, in other words, the most extreme for 65 million years. And in at least one respect, this human-made hecatomb is worse than at any time in the geological past. In the earlier mass extinctions, possibly caused by large meteoritic strikes, most of the plant diversity survived; now, for the first time, it is being mostly destroyed. (Noss and Cooperrider 17)

Forgive us, Mr. Chairman, but against such a backdrop, when one of your hunter-clients boasts that, thanks to hunters, there are more deer and turkey in the United States than when the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, and that therefore hunter-led conservation has been successful, the only possible response is to cringe. And when the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) proposes to help those species that are "slipping through the cracks" by making sure that the oil and gas industry will not be burdened by endangered-species regulations that "inhibit business, slow the economy" or, heaven forfend, entail "lost revenue from project delays" (Blue Ribbon Panel, *The Future of America's Fish and Wildlife*), the only possible response is to demand a better way.

Aldo Leopold offered us a better way. He has been forsaken because man the conqueror refuses to put down his sword.

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Rhetoric and Reality: Understanding "Conservation"

The "A-B cleavage" lamented by Leopold has bedeviled American conservation for well over a hundred years. Understanding it is so important that we will, much like the Colorado River once did, take the time to meander through some interesting historical groves, lovely and otherwise. Let us begin, at your own invitation, by revisiting the famous meeting between John Muir and President Theodore Roosevelt at Yosemite's Glacier Point, overlooking the valley that Muir described as the grandest temple of

nature he was ever permitted to enter. Muir is generally taken to be the quintessential preservationist, someone who, as Gifford Pinchot saw it, wanted to "lock up resources" by preventing human exploitation of the wilderness. This is not entirely accurate, for Muir, especially in his politically active later years, was perfectly willing to deploy utilitarian arguments if he thought they would advance his more spiritual cause. In 1903, Muir had high hopes for Roosevelt and the new system of national forests the president's administration would create. But long before the damming of Hetch Hetchy – the "other Yosemite Valley" that Muir loved just as much but which we can never know - those hopes had been dashed.

In *The Hunter Conservationist Paradox*, an FWC press release that was widely (and rather provocatively) circulated in the immediate aftermath of the 2015 bear hunt, you concluded with the following statements:

> In the spring of 1903, President Roosevelt made a cross country trip to Yosemite to sit around a campfire with John Muir, famous naturalist and founder of the Sierra Club. Many historians believe this meeting inspired the President's aggressive approach to protecting American landscapes and wildlife treasures for future generations. John Muir was a critic of hunting. It is said that he and TR had spirited debates on the subject, but their common love for the natural world moved them beyond these differences to become the original architects of America's conservation legacy.
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> We are so fortunate that John Muir recognized and accepted the hunter conservationist paradox so profoundly personified by Theodore Roosevelt. Today's conservation community, both hunters and environmentalists alike, can learn a lot from the great example set by these two great men. We all need to be more willing to share a campfire with those who think differently about wildlife conservation, focusing on our common ground so future generations can enjoy a rich wildlife legacy.

Your statement that Muir "accepted" the "hunter conservationist paradox" is not supported by the historical record. More importantly, this image of happy campers glosses over fundamental differences that had nothing to do with hunting, thereby preventing perception of the institutionalization of the cleavage.

In describing Muir's meeting with Roosevelt, Professor Donald Worster, one of this country's finest environmental historians, gives his readers a more complete picture:

> [Muir] was a western mountain man, at ease in the saddle or climbing a rock, images that reinforced Roosevelt's zest for the strenuous, manly life. Yet Muir also

> appealed intensely to women and men opposed to sport killing and other displays of super-masculinity in nature. When Daniel Beard wrote to get his support for a society of boys called the Sons of Daniel Boone... Muir replied that the society should encourage boys to grow out of "natural hunting blood-loving savagery into natural sympathy with all our fellow mortals – plants and animals as well as men." Similarly, he lamented to Henry Osborn that "the murder business & sport by saint & sinner alike has been pushed ruthlessly," until there was little wildlife left to slaughter; it was time, he hoped, for a "glimmering recognition of the rights of animals & their kinship to ourselves." (Worster, *A Passion for Nature* 369]

Thus, we should not be surprised that Muir excoriated Roosevelt in person:

> "Mr. Roosevelt," he asked at one point, "when are you going to get beyond the boyishness of killing things... are you not getting far enough along to leave that off?" Taken aback, the President replied, "Muir, I guess you are right." (Nash 139)

But Muir's attitude toward hunting, and, for that matter, Aldo Leopold's attitude toward hunting - which in many ways echoed Muir's equation of hunting with personal immaturity (Meine 296) - is not the key issue here. If anything, it is a distraction. Muir and Roosevelt had very different philosophies about conservation, and while Muir's preservationist legacy lives on in our National Parks (and beleaguered wilderness areas), Roosevelt's version of conservation emerged triumphant on the vastly greater swathes of public land managed by the Forest Service, other federal agencies and, ultimately, state wildlife agencies, where it would steadfastly exclude the side that did not share its values. The embers of that campfire at Glacier Point were scattered to the winds.

The single best explanation of Progressive Era conservation is Professor Samuel Hays' masterful work, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency*, originally published in 1959, and required reading in many university courses ever since. From the very beginning, Hays made it clear that the common conception of the Progressive Era as a popular crusade to rein in the abuses of big business is highly misleading.

> Examining the record, one is forced to distinguish sharply between rhetoric and reality.... Conservation neither arose from a broad popular outcry, nor centered its fire primarily on the private corporation. Moreover, corporations often supported conservation policies, while the "people" just as frequently opposed them. In fact, it becomes clear that one must discard completely the struggle against corporations as the setting in which to understand conservation history, and permit an entirely new frame of reference to arise from the evidence itself.
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> Conservation, above all, was a scientific movement.... Its essence was rational

> planning to promote efficient development and use of all natural resources.... The popular view that in a fit of pessimism they [conservation leaders] withdrew vast areas of the public lands from present use for future development does not stand examination. In fact, they bitterly opposed those who sought to withdraw resources from commercial development....
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> Since resource matters were basically technical in nature... [c]onservationists envisaged... a political system guided by the ideal of efficiency and dominated by the technicians who could best determine how to achieve it. (Hays 1-3)

In theory, utilitarianism meant pursuing the greatest good for the greatest number (of people, of course) for the longest period of time. The 1897 report of the National Forest Commission, of which Pinchot was a member, expressed the implications of this anthropocentric philosophy for the huge holdings of public lands in the West:

> They must be made to perform their part in the economy of the Nation. Unless the reserved lands of the public domain are made to contribute to the welfare and prosperity of the country, they should be thrown open to settlement and the whole system of reserved lands abandoned. (Worster, *Nature's Economy* 266)

That passage merits multiple readings. No wonder Muir was disgusted and ended his friendship with Pinchot (Nash 137-138). Here, in unvarnished terms, we see land as slave and servant, "made to perform" (or else!) for human economic prosperity. As Professor Worster observed, "Protecting the nation's economy, not nature's, was the central theme of [Pinchot's] conservation philosophy.... [H]e could see value in the land chiefly where it could be turned to profit." (*Nature's Economy* 267)

Professor Gabriel Kolko, whose brilliant history of the Progressive Era cited Hays with approval, noted how the greatest good tended to flow to those with the greatest power:

> The dominant motive behind conservation was a realization that lumber resources were being permanently squandered by indiscriminate cutting, and that in the long run the fortunes of the lumber industry would decline as a result of such practices. Supported by the Northern Pacific Railroad, Weyerhaeuser Timber, King Lumber, and other giant corporations, Gifford Pinchot – the most famous of the conservationists – developed a program of sustained yield planting. Pinchot... regarded the forests as economic resources and strongly opposed using the forests as pure wilderness or game reserves.... Roosevelt supported the Pinchot school against the "preservationists" opposing cutting of any sort. In this, as in most other matters, Roosevelt was fundamentally the conservative. (Kolko 110-111)

All too often, the true meaning of "conservation" has been obscured by the discussion of the creation of national forests (which would be "made to perform") in the same breath as listings of Roosevelt's creations of national parks and monuments, which would only be "used" for recreation, but were comparatively trivial in total area. The materialistic thrust of conservation has been camouflaged by an aura of nobility, maintaining the popular sense that Roosevelt prevented greedy corporations from "raping" the wilderness. Even Pulitzer-prize winning historians, like Roosevelt biographer Edmund Morris, are guilty of this. (See, for example, *Theodore Rex* 519.) At best, one might say that the conservationists presented the land with a choice: be "scientifically managed" or be raped. For many parts of nature's economy, that would be a distinction without a difference.

Muir took too long to figure out which side Roosevelt was really on, despite public addresses from the president that were unabashedly utilitarian:

> In 1901 he declared in his first annual message that "the fundamental idea of forestry is the perpetuation of forests by use. Forest protection is not an end in itself; it is a means to increase and sustain the resources of our country and the industries which depend on them."... [T]wo years later in an address on the goal of forestry [he stated]: "Primarily the object is not to preserve forests because they are beautiful – though that is good in itself – not to preserve them because they are refuges for the wild creatures of the wilderness – though that too is good in itself – but the primary object of forest policy... is the making of prosperous homes, is part of the traditional policy of homemaking in our country." (Nash 162-163)

The meaning of conservation was, from Muir's standpoint, being hijacked (and one might add that the hijackers have never returned it). When Roosevelt called a Governors Conference in 1908 to sell his conservation agenda, Muir was conspicuously not invited.

> The protection of nonhuman life or of natural beauty, or even of outdoor recreational opportunity, had vanished from the agenda; a more material strategy of avoiding resource depletion and national decline was all that mattered.... Muir... would have questioned the very materialism that Roosevelt appealed to, along with his message of impending doom. The United States was in no danger of economic collapse, Muir would have scoffed, only of losing its soul. The White House was attempting to redefine and popularize conservation and did not want any competing views, even if it meant excluding some of the nation's most widely known conservationists. (Worster, *A Passion for Nature* 429-430)

Muir continued to grasp at any available straw in the hope of saving Hetch Hetchy from the claims of San Francisco's boosters that it needed a reservoir, but Roosevelt's

administration, through Secretary of the Interior Garfield's permit, allowed the project to proceed. Although the valley's fate was not sealed until President Wilson signed the Hetch Hetchy bill in 1913, Roosevelt had made his decision. Here, then, we see a true "TR moment":

> Roosevelt's initial reaction... was to seek advice from engineers.... The report, however, was that Hetch Hetchy offered the only practical solution to San Francisco's problem.... While assuring Muir that he would do everything possible to protect the national parks, the President reminded him that if these reservations "interfere with the permanent material development of the State instead of helping... the result will be bad." (Nash 164)

Indeed it was. Science had sharpened the conqueror's sword, and one of John Muir's beloved temples was destroyed forever, impoverishing the nation in a profound way that Pinchot discounted as "altogether unimportant" (Nash 161).

Hetch Hetchy Valley 1908. Photo by Isaiah West Taber

Of course, we are always told that "something good came out of it," to wit, the creation of the National Park Service, which would supposedly ensure that nothing like it would ever happen again. But that offered no more protection than the famous Model to Aldo Leopold's green lagoons, and countless other blank spots on the map that have been converted since 1916 to "wiser uses." To take just one example, visitors to Theodore

Roosevelt National Park in the badlands of North Dakota, which sits atop the Bakken Shale Formation – a resource much prized by today's boosters - reach the park by traveling through zones of industrial oil extraction, and may then enjoy the sight and sound of flares from drilling rigs, the rumble of heavy equipment, and the smell of dust and fumes (Kaplan, *Drilling Down*). The fate of the wildlife in this precious ecosystem? Altogether unimportant. The conquest continues, with man's sword being driven ever deeper into the heart of the land.

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When Pinchot's conservationists set about "making the land perform," they studied the land's potential to contribute to the nation's economy, determining each area's "highest and best use." In addition to forestry, mining, and irrigation, one of their favored uses was sheep and cattle grazing. John Muir – who spent his first summer in the Sierra as a shepherd – understood all too well how ecologically destructive these "hoofed locusts" could be, and also understood that the real cause of the destruction was the profit motive that placed them in the mountains to begin with (Worster, *A Passion for Nature* 161-162). As Professor Worster explained in his classic text on ecological history, *Nature's Economy*, the conservationists supported their chosen use of the land by undoing nature's chosen use of the land with characteristic "efficiency."

> What is generally left out of this [reformist] interpretation is that, for several decades, a major feature of the crusade for resource conservation was a deliberate campaign to destroy wild animals – one of the most efficient, well-organized, and well-financed such efforts in all of man's history. This destruction was not in the least incidental; it was the clearly-stated policy of certain leading conservationists, and a central goal of the government programs they established and ran. It was this policy that finished off the wolf in the early years of the century, and that same conservation ideal has been, and still is, promoting the war against the coyote....
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> In a sense, not much was new in this Progressive conservation; nature was still valued chiefly as a commodity to be used for man's economic success. But old attitudes were given vastly more effective means for their implementation. For the first time, the resources of the federal government were brought to bear against the predator. Instead of relying on the varmint-blasting frontiersman, the government itself undertook to eliminate the predator once and for all. (261-262)

In his book *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*, based on his youthful journals and published posthumously, Muir offered an apt and, sadly, timeless commentary:

> I have precious little sympathy for the selfish propriety of civilized man, and if a war of the races should occur between the wild beasts and Lord Man, I would be tempted to sympathize with the bears. (Worster, *A Passion for Nature* 138)

Ten years after Muir's death in 1914, grizzly bears were extinct in California. Lord Man had prevailed. In Kevin Starr's much-lauded history of California, which celebrates the realization of man's California dream, the extinction of the grizzly merits not one word; it was altogether unimportant. The indigenous peoples had lived in harmony with the great bear for thousands of years. But, of course, they told themselves a very different type of "success story."

Happy campers, indeed.

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Forsaken Father: The Evolution of Aldo Leopold

As a boy, Aldo Leopold enjoyed hunting immensely, and it must be acknowledged that this played a role in the germination of his ecological conscience. In the unpublished version of the foreword to the *Almanac*, Leopold explained how the conversion of his boyhood hunting grounds from marshland to cornfields gave him his "first doubt about man in the role of conqueror." (Callicott, *Companion* 282) But as a graduate of the Yale School of Forestry, which had been founded with Pinchot family money, and as an ambitious employee of the U.S. Forest Service, of which Pinchot was the legendary first "Chief," Leopold was trained to think like a Progressive conservationist. Although others were moving in the same direction, it was Leopold who led the drive to apply Pinchot's scientific management principles to his lifelong passion, wildlife (or, at least, to the subset of wildlife considered useful by recreational hunters, known as "game").

As Leopold scholars Susan Flader and J. Baird Callicott have explained, Leopold's classic case for modeling game conservation on forest conservation, published in 1918, extended the concept of "highest use" to its next logical step beyond timber production, watershed protection, and grazing. A strong scientific foundation, just as in professional forestry, could be applied to game:

> Point by point, Leopold explores the analogy: A game census is to game management what reconnaissance is to forestry; law enforcement against poaching is analogous to fire control, breeding stock to seed trees, license fees to stumpage rates, bag limits and closed seasons to limitation of cut, and game farm to nursery. The fundamental utilitarian/economic concepts of supply and demand,

> sustained yield, and market forces all apply equally to both, and so on. (Leopold, *The River of the Mother of God* 17)

Thus, we find Leopold selling his case to fellow foresters in the following terms:

> *There is a demand for every head of killable big game in the United States*, wherever it may be. Five million sportsmen are looking for hunting grounds, and many in vain. Indeed, it may be said that, as far as market is concerned, we are more ready to practice game management than to practice forest management. (*The River of the Mother of God* 57) [Italics in original text.]

Much of this is, of course, readily discernible in the contemporary structure of professional wildlife management. But it is not, as we saw earlier in this letter, evident in the writing of the mature Aldo Leopold. In 1918, Leopold was still very much on one side of the “A-B cleavage.” Somewhere along the line, he switched sides. But this does not mean that he ended up, as some environmentalists have contended, on John Muir's side of the campfire. For as Callicott and Freyfogle have pointed out, neither of the approaches associated with Pinchot or Muir were particularly well suited to the Midwest, the region in which Leopold was born and to which he returned after leaving New Mexico. With the exception of the Boundary Waters, there was little pristine wilderness left to preserve. Nor were there large tracts of public land to be managed by scientifically trained technicians (Leopold, *For the Health of the Land* 16). Instead, central Wisconsin, which Leopold would call home for the rest of his life, was dominated by small private farms, many of which had been abused, to the point of being worn out, by poor farming practices. (He would later purchase one such tract, and devote himself to its restoration.) In such a setting, Leopold would eventually formulate a new paradigm - not just for managing game, but for relating to land in the larger sense, with the aim of preventing and healing the “land sickness” that he saw all around him. And whereas Muir had concentrated on America's most spectacular scenic wonders – particularly the Sierra Nevada and Alaska – Leopold was concerned with “the back forty” - the ordinary, the drab, the forgotten pieces of land, whose beauty could only be perceived by an ecologically sensitive mind. While Muir was certainly capable of profound ecological insight, and indeed anticipated Leopold's later holism (Nash 129), Muir's focus on grand temples was always going to limit the applicability of his approach to conservation. Leopold's focus, on the other hand, makes him indispensable almost everywhere.

As Leopold's principal biographer, Curt Meine, has pointed out, *Game Management* – which would become the standard text of your profession for many years – remained essentially utilitarian, explaining “how the natural world could be manipulated and controlled to produce more game.” (Meine 294) But Pinchovian control had to be

tempered by the reality of conditions on the ground, as noted above. Leopold wished to work with a lighter touch, giving nature a helping hand here or there, rather than churning out artificial crops from game farms. The American Game Policy of 1930 spearheaded by Leopold emphasized the urgent need for private landowners to provide habitat for farm game species, while retaining public ownership of, and access to, the wildlife. A system of inducements, combined with technical assistance from trained professionals, was the way forward. Not all hunters agreed. The extract below is from Leopold's essay *Grand Opera Game* (1932), which was rejected by the magazine *Sportsman* due to its opposition to the proposed policy.

> Game management lubricates the engine we call "Nature," rather than building a substitute engine in the form of a propagating plant. The motive power is that natural force implied in the biblical injunction, "Go forth and replenish the earth," and which the professors define impersonally as "the tendency of any species to increase to the capacity of its environment."
>
> The game manager simply enlarges the capacity of the environment by improving cover and food, and by protecting the game against natural enemies and overshooting. The increase follows.
>
> Artificial rearing is, of course, one form of game management, and a very useful one, but it does not produce "grand opera." (*The River of the Mother of God* 169-172)

While several aspects of the American Game Policy of 1930 went on to enjoy wide implementation, we note with interest that two key points of the plan have been less fortunate. In Leopold's *Report to the American Game Conference on an American Game Policy*, the last two points of the "program" were:

> *6. Recognize the non-shooting protectionist and the scientist* as sharing with sportsmen and landowners the responsibility for conservation of wild life as a whole. Insist on a joint conservation program, *jointly formulated and jointly financed*.
>
> *7. Provide funds*. Insist on public funds from general taxation for all betterments serving wild life as a whole. Let the sportsmen pay for all betterments serving game alone. Seek private funds to help carry the cost of education and research. (*The River of the Mother of God* 155) [Italics in original.]

So, eighty-seven years ago, *even while still in his utilitarian phase* and laying the foundations of your institution, Aldo Leopold recommended a system of financing that

would require hunters to pay for what they were interested in – shootable game – but would have the public pay for non-game conservation, using *general tax revenue* as the primary source of funds. Bear in mind also that, during this period in his professional life, Leopold was working as a consulting forester and struggled to make a living until an academic post was created for him at the University of Wisconsin. Much of the game survey work he conducted in the Midwest during those lean years was financed by the firearms industry. Yet he called for a system of financing "serving wildlife as a whole" that was broad-based and democratic – much like the Public Trust Doctrine itself – instead of one that facilitated agency capture by special interests, along the lines of the subsequent Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson Acts. Here, then, we have a classic example of a missed opportunity.

Had Leopold's prescription for inclusive conservation been heeded, the central argument in *The Hunter Conservationist Paradox* - the claim that "hunters pay for conservation," used repeatedly by you and many of your peers to exclude the non-hunting public from joint formulation of the conservation program - could never even have been made with respect to conservation as a whole. No doubt, there would have been conflict over where to draw the line between "game" and "non-game" conservation, but the field would never have been dominated so completely by consumptive users of "renewable natural resources." Furthermore, you would not now be publicly worrying about "dancing on the head of a pin" in order to sustain wildlife management for the one-percent. (If you would like to climb down from that precarious position, Mr. Chairman, you have none other than Aldo Leopold to steady your descent.) But most importantly of all, non-game species could have been accorded far more than just incidental protection, and far fewer of them would be "slipping through the cracks" that the AFWA blames on inadequate funding (Blue Ribbon Panel Report). If the AFWA would really like to help the American people "invest" in wildlife conservation, it could respect the wisdom of the father of its own institution and allow them to do so through general taxation, instead of through royalties on oil and gas drilling, which Leopold would have abhorred. (The AFWA's contention that its royalty scheme is easier to pass in Congress reeks of insincerity after multiple failed attempts. But, should they finally succeed in the new, industry-friendly regime, we wish you the best of luck, Mr. Chairman, in composing a future press release entitled *The Fracker Conservationist Paradox*. A vacation at Theodore Roosevelt National Park would be an excellent way to begin your research.)

Thus, there have been two major hijackings in American conservation history. First, as we have seen, the meaning of "conservation" was redefined by the Roosevelt-Pinchot utilitarians, enshrining materialism and resourcism at the expense of spiritualism or any sort of nonanthropocentric ethics. Second, the practice of wildlife conservation became the exclusive province of the "sportsmen," who have been pouring scorn on the "non-shooting protectionist" ever since, and have been unwilling to listen to the scientists who

tell them to stop playing their deadly games.

**

It is after 1933 that Aldo Leopold's “odyssey” (Lutz Newton) would take him all the way to the other side of the A-B cleavage. *Game Management* “captured Leopold in a state of transition” (Meine 294) and was “[i]n a sense... an anachronism” (Worster, *Nature's Economy* 273). A wide variety of causes have been adduced as explanations, though it is most accurate to think of them as catalysts, for there had been clues years earlier that Leopold was always going to be ahead of his time. (His remarkable 1923 essay, *Some Fundamentals of Conservation in the Southwest,* which was never published in his lifetime, began as a classic expression of Pinchovian conservation, but ended by speculating that the earth itself might be a living organism, anticipating James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis by decades.) There is no doubt that his trip to Germany, to study forestry on a fellowship, affected him profoundly. There, he saw the impact of total human control of the forest and of game species, and he was horrified by its artificiality. (Pinchot had been trained in Germany.) By contrast, in 1937 he enjoyed a pack trip along the Rio Gavilan in northern Mexico, and found land that was supremely healthy precisely because natural processes still reigned – including predation by wolves and mountain lions. In his lyrical account of the trip, *Song of the Gavilan*, we see a growing realization that science was sharpening the conqueror's sword:

> Science contributes moral as well as material blessings to the world. Its great moral contribution is objectivity, or the scientific point of view. This means doubting everything except facts, let the chips fall where they may. One of the facts hewn to by science is that every river needs more people, and all people need more inventions, and hence more science; the good life depends on the indefinite extension of this chain of logic. That the good life on any river may likewise depend on the perception of its music, and the preservation of some music to perceive, is a form of doubt not yet entertained by science. (*Almanac* 134)

One year after that trip, in *Conservation Esthetics* (1938), he would be even more explicit. This essay argues that most forms of outdoor recreation, especially in the motorized age, are destructive. We could allow ourselves to be distracted by his disparaging remarks about trophy hunters being “the caveman reborn,” but he has another target in mind. Positing the cultivation of ecological perception as the least destructive form of outdoor recreation, Leopold concludes with the famous line that, “Recreational development is a job not of building roads into lovely country, but of building receptivity into the still unlovely human mind.” And those with technical training were not necessarily suited to this task.

> To promote perception is the only truly creative part of recreational engineering.
>
> This fact is important, and its potential power for bettering 'the good life' only dimly understood.... Ecological science has wrought a change in the mental eye. It has disclosed origins and functions for what to [Daniel] Boone were only facts.... [A]s compared to the competent ecologist of the present day, Boone saw only the surface of things. The incredible intricacies of the plant and animal community – the intrinsic beauty of the organism called America, then in the full bloom of her maidenhood – were as invisible and incomprehensible to Daniel Boone as they are today to Mr. Babbit [Sinclair Lewis's fictional middle-class businessman].
>
> Let no man jump to the conclusion that Babbitt must take his Ph.D. in ecology before he can 'see' his country. On the contrary, the Ph.D. may become as callous as an undertaker to the mysteries at which he officiates. (*Almanac* 149-150)

This whole passage, not just the last line, deserves to be re-read several times. Its references to “incredible intricacies”, “the organism”, and “mysteries” express a crucial lesson in Aldo Leopold's evolution; namely, that the natural world was far too complex for man to even understand, let alone manipulate and control. And recognition of that fact required man to change his attitude from arrogance to humility, and to change his violent, mechanized behavior to something far gentler and more respectful.

Of all the catalysts for change working on Leopold's thinking in the 1930s, one of the most important was the coming of age of ecology as a scientific discipline in its own right. As Professor Worster has noted:

> Leopold was rather slow to switch to this new attitude; but when he did, he came over with an eloquence and credibility that quickly made him one of the leaders of the new ecological element. While many students were still absorbing the lessons of Pinchot from *Game Management*, Leopold himself would be attacking most of what that old conservation school had stood for. (*Nature's Economy* 274)

Professor Flader elaborates:

> This new attitude involved a commitment to preserve threatened species, especially threatened animals such as wolves and grizzlies, which Leopold now realized were essential to the healthy functioning of ecosystems. The year 1935 [in which he went to Germany] marked a reorientation in his thinking from a historical and recreational to a predominantly ecological and ethical justification for wilderness. (*Thinking Like A Mountain* 29)

One of the pillars of the old school, as we have seen, was ruthless predator control. To this day, attitudes toward predators remain a reliable litmus test of which side of the A-B cleavage a “conservationist” occupies. It was clear in *Conservation Esthetics* that Leopold had switched sides on this issue:

> To safeguard this expensive, artificial, and more or less helpless [hatchery-raised] trout, the Conservation Commission feels impelled to kill all herons and terns visiting the hatchery where it was raised, and all mergansers and otters inhabiting the stream in which it is released. The fisherman perhaps feels no loss in this sacrifice of one kind of wild life for another, but the ornithologist is ready to bite off ten-penny nails. Artificialized management has, in effect, bought fishing at the expense of another and perhaps higher recreation; it has paid dividends to one citizen out of capital stock belonging to all. The same kind of biological wildcatting prevails in game management. In Europe, where wild-crop statistics are available for long periods, we even know the 'rate of exchange' of game for predators. (*Almanac* 146-147)

Here, in his disapproval of dividends paid to sportsmen, we see Leopold's firm grasp of public-trust principles. In the next passage, from *Thinking Like a Mountain*, his most famous defense of predators, we see his ecological insight and his willingness to admit his own mistakes.

> In those days we had never heard of passing up a chance to kill a wolf. In a second we were pumping lead into the pack.... When our rifles were empty, the old wolf was down, and a pup was dragging a leg into impassable slide rocks.
>
> We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes – something known only to her and to the mountain. I was young then, and full of trigger itch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters' paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view. (*Almanac* 114-115)

You must forgive us for asking, Mr. Chairman, but when Florida's bear hunters came upon their “harvested resources,” did they see any kind of light being extinguished? Did they ask themselves whether their belief that “the population had to be managed” was shared by the bear, or by the forest? Were they even capable of asking such questions, Mr. Chairman? Did they possess the necessary powers of perception, or were they merely “cavemen reborn”? Did the PhD officiating over this “management hunt” see the incredible intricacies and intrinsic beauty of the forest? Had his extensive training taught

him how to perceive the mysteries beneath the surface of things, or simply how to serve the industrialized State as an efficient undertaker?

**

Leopold's ecologically-informed belief in the need to keep natural predators on the land courted controversy with old-school conservationists who wanted to maximize their crops of deer, no matter the consequences for the larger ecosystem. Leopold had not been particularly perturbed by the now legendary explosion of the deer population on Arizona's Kaibab Plateau, adjacent to the Grand Canyon. He was no longer in the Southwest when matters came to a head, and regarded the isolated and protected Plateau as a special case, from which no paradigm-challenging conclusions needed to be drawn (Flader 84-87). Thus, the eradication of predators from the Plateau does not seem to have figured in his thinking – but that was in the 1920s. By the time he found himself on Wisconsin's Conservation Commission, Leopold was a different man. Placing himself at odds with those who wanted "the boys" to have deer to shoot when they returned from the War, Leopold argued strenuously for a dramatic reduction in Wisconsin's deer herds, which he believed were literally eating themselves out of house and home and destroying the overall health of the forests in the process. A split season (four days of buck and then four days of doe) resulted in an unusually large kill in 1943. It was not handled well by the Commission and Leopold became the scapegoat for the "crime of '43" (Flader 198-202), experiencing a level of hostility with which you have some familiarity (but for entirely different reasons). Thereafter, his arguments, which included the *bête noire* of natural predation by wolves, could gain no traction, and he became isolated on the Commission. Leopold regarded excess deer as a "biological fire," and felt obligated as an ecologist to show how they damaged the health of the land (Flader 206-207).

Inappropriate conclusions should not be drawn from this episode. Leopold advocated a deer cull for *ecological* reasons. Deer in Wisconsin (or on the Kaibab) are in no way analogous to bears in the Ocala National Forest, and your own documents effectively admit this. Florida's 2012 Bear Management Plan acknowledged the great ecological value of the Florida black bear as an umbrella species and seed disperser (17). The tendency of bears to interfere with your clients' deer feeders does not make them a biological fire. If we seek the causes of ecological disorder (land sickness) in Florida, the bears are the *last* place to look. (If bears, not property "developers" or agribusiness concerns, were allowed to "manage" the land, it would undoubtedly be in far better health. One wonders if, by 2060 perhaps, someone within your institution will be willing to say so.)

With the prospect of grizzly hunting around Yellowstone National Park looming ever

closer – and the oil and gas industry relishing the future revenue from projects "delayed" by the Endangered Species Act – we recall Leopold's words in *Escudilla*, in which he regretted his involvement in the killing of the last grizzly on an Arizona mountain.

> The government trapper who took the grizzly knew he had made Escudilla safe for cows. He did not know he had toppled the spire of an edifice a-building since the morning stars sang together....
>
> We forest officers, who acquiesced in the extinguishment of the bear, knew a local rancher who had plowed up a dagger engraved with the name of one of Coronado's captains. We spoke harshly of the Spaniards who, in their zeal for gold and converts, had needlessly extinguished the native Indians. It did not occur to us that we, too, were the captains of an invasion too sure of its own righteousness. (*Almanac* 120-121)

The best available science makes it clear that a grizzly population of 700, experiencing ever-higher human-caused mortality rates even without (legal) hunting, and increasingly blocked from genetic interchange with the larger subpopulation in and around Glacier National Park, faces extinction in the long run. But the conquerors find such timescales altogether unimportant. In a seldom-noticed but still highly-relevant 1942 essay, *The Grizzly – A Problem in Land Planning,* Leopold called for grizzly ranges to be set aside, and freed from livestock. In an age before hydraulic fracturing, he saw no perceptible dent in the West's economy from such an accommodation. And he spells out quite clearly part of the reason why human land planners are failing the grizzly:

> Administrators, I fear, tend to do their wildlifing in the interest of deer and elk, of which we have a glut in most regions, but which furnish the gunfodder on which public [i.e. hunter] sentiment feeds....
>
> Only those able to see the pageant of evolution can be expected to value its theatre, the wilderness, or its outstanding achievement, the grizzly. But if education really educates, there will, in time, be more and more citizens who understand that relics of the old West add meaning and value to the new.... [E]ach generation will ask: where is the big white bear? It will be a sorry answer to say he went under while conservationists weren't looking. (*Almanac* 463-465)

But the "conservationists" *are* looking. They are looking out for the business interests of the oil and gas industry, just as Gifford Pinchot looked out for the timber companies and the railroads. They are looking after the stockmen, waging war against wild canids with the same zeal as the old Bureau of the Biological Survey. And they are looking out for the license-buying "sportsman," privileging the most immature and destructive forms of

outdoor recreation, thereby ensuring that, even when we play, the world will be all about “resources.” The spirit of utilitarian conservation hangs over the relics of the old West and haunts the woods of the East. Sure of its own righteousness, it extinguishes values it does not comprehend, unable to perceive the incredible intricacies of the natural world over which it officiates. Yet, as Leopold hoped, more and more educated citizens have come to realize that the conquerors' values are not their own. A new generation is asking where the bears are. And they will not accept sorry answers from administrators who do not even respect the father of their own institution.

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From Conquest to Harmony

Leopold's most-studied essay, *The Land Ethic*, contained the distilled essence of his mature thought. Painstakingly assembled from papers written between 1933 and 1947, it bequeathed to us the following definition of conservation:

> Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land. (*Almanac* 175)

The essay discusses how human ethics are capable of evolving from narrow self-interest to a broader concern for the community as a whole, which for Leopold included the “land-community,” of which man should, in his view, be just “a plain member and citizen,” not “a conqueror” (173). The ethic developed by Leopold is thoroughly ecocentric, not anthropocentric (Callicott, *In Defense of the Land Ethic*). In marked contrast to the Progressive Era “conservationists,” including Pinchot and Roosevelt, Leopold did not place man's interests ahead of nature's, for man was simply another part of nature, and all the parts had earned a right to continuance by surviving eons of evolution. Contrary to the delusions of many of your clients, Leopold placed humans on “an intermediate layer” of the “land pyramid,” alongside bears, raccoons, and squirrels (181). For Leopold, the central conservation problem was that industrial technology had enabled man to wield a destructive power wholly out of step with natural processes. Ultimately, the only way to restrain this behavior was through the limiting effect of a land ethic operating at the individual level.

> The 'key-log' which must be moved to release the evolutionary process for an ethic is simply this: quit thinking about decent land-use as solely an economic problem. Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and esthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. 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. (188)

Professor Flader, the first scholar to offer a full interpretation of Leopold's life and work, helps us to understand what he meant:

> The old approach of economic biology that conceived of the biota as a system of competitions and sought to give a competitive advantage to those species deemed “useful,” whether corn or pines or deer, as against those deemed harmful or expendable, would have to give way to a new ecological approach which conceived of the biota as a single system, the land organism, “so complex, so conditioned by interwoven co-operations and competitions, that no man can say where utility begins or ends.” Thus did Leopold express the transition from conservation as a preoccupation with supply and demand to conservation as a state of land health....
>
> Three decades of experience trying to “control” wildlife populations by manipulating selected environmental factors had had a profoundly sobering effect on Leopold. A proper function of management, it now became apparent to him, was to encourage the greatest possible [biological] diversity in an attempt to preserve the widest possible realm in which natural processes might seek their own equilibrium.
>
> Along with Leopold's greater consciousness of ecological enigmas... came an impatience with the prevailing emphasis on “blood and feathers dividends.” Although the name of the profession had changed in less than a decade from the rather too economic *game* management to the somewhat broader designation of *wildlife* management... Leopold was already thinking more in terms of wildlife ecology. He looked forward to “an almost romantic expansion in professional responsibilities” in the wildlife field. (Flader 31-32)

Within a year of finishing the final version of *The Land Ethic*, Aldo Leopold died while helping a neighboring farmer fight a brush fire. He was only 61. One may be forgiven for wondering whether the real cause of death was a broken heart.

Earlier in this letter, we highlighted a prime example of human behavior that was wrong in the terms that Aldo Leopold described. We asked you to imagine how he would have felt about the total destruction of his beloved green lagoons. Now, after everything else we have discussed in these pages, some additional questions must be asked. How do you think Aldo Leopold would feel about the state of the institution he fathered? How would he feel about its refusal to abandon concepts that he long ago found wanting on so many levels? And how would he feel about our collective failure, as a supposedly “evolved” society, to perceive the incredible intricacies of the land he loved, to marvel at its mysteries, and to realize that “it” is not a thing to be enslaved? We would not have

written this letter to you, Mr. Chairman, if we did not think you were capable of answering these questions.

The land ethic commands each of us, as individual citizens, to behave rightly with respect to the natural world that sustains us. For you, the implications of this command are particularly far-reaching. You must make a decision, Mr. Chairman. Are you going to continue to view our conservation challenges as resource questions best answered by technicians and economists, or are you going to accept the invitation extended to you by Aldo Leopold to show man the conqueror how to - finally - put down his sword and live in harmony with his fellow players in the orchestra of evolution?

There is an opportunity here, and a place in history awaits the leader who seizes it. Aldo Leopold evolved. Can you?

Sincerely,

Adam Sugalski

Executive Director
One Protest | Stop the Florida Bear Hunt

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