



*Fostering the
Land Ethic
through the legacy
of Aldo Leopold*

September 11, 2013

"Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and aesthetically 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."

-Aldo Leopold

The Honorable Richard J. Berry
Mayor, City of Albuquerque
PO Box 1293
Albuquerque, NM 87103

Dear Mayor Berry:

I am writing to you today regarding the proposed Rio Grande Vision. As the president and executive director of the Aldo Leopold Foundation, I have heard concerns from our constituents and board members regarding the proposed plan. The Bosque is important to the local community as well as all residents in the state of New Mexico and to the many visitors that come from throughout the United States and beyond.

As you are aware, Aldo Leopold himself lived and worked in New Mexico for the United States Forest Service, and even the Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce. While there, Leopold was inspired by the natural world that surrounded him which led to the idea of wilderness protection. In 1921, he published an article in the *Journal of Forestry* defending America's need for wilderness. In it, he delineated a list of criteria for wilderness areas – namely "a continuous stretch of country preserved in its natural state, open to lawful hunting and fishing, big enough to absorb a two weeks' pack trip, and devoid of roads, artificial trails, cottages, or other works of man."

While it is important for the public to have access to these natural areas, many of which are quite remote, it is also important to have wild places where all citizens can engage and interact with the natural world. The Rio Grande Valley State Park as originally envisioned by Leopold and other community leaders was to be a place that embodied "wildness" for recreational, spiritual, and ecological benefits to residents of the city of Albuquerque. The current proposal undermines many of these values in exchange for what very well may be short term gains.

We do understand the need for community and economic development but would point to numerous examples of where Leopold's legacies (and that of so many other New Mexicans past, present, and future) have created new opportunities for the community. In 2009, we helped convene a gathering at the National Hispanic Cultural Center that brought together leading thinkers and community organizers from Albuquerque, New Mexico, and the nation to examine just how important places like the Bosque are to our communities. Then in 2011, we held the national release of *Green Fire*, a documentary about

Leopold and his idea of a Land Ethic, which drew over 1,000 people (the film has subsequently been shown on New Mexico Public Television numerous times). And looking forward there will be a major national conference in 2014 in Albuquerque celebrating the origins of the Wilderness concept as part of the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act. The conference is expected to bring thousands of visitors to Albuquerque. What a shame it would be if they arrived only to see the city turning its back on the unique history and ecological character of the Bosque.

In *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold set forth his most enduring idea, the "land ethic," a moral responsibility of humans to the natural world. The board and staff of the Aldo Leopold Foundation continue to work daily to extend Leopold's vision of a Land Ethic. Now is the time for you, as you work through the Rio Grand Vision, to think about and ask yourself (and all those involved) what the best next steps are in preserving the Bosque and Albuquerque's biotic community for all future generations to enjoy and fully appreciate.

Thank you in advance for your full consideration. Feel free to contact me anytime if you would like to discuss this further.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Buddy Huffaker", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Buddy Huffaker

President and Executive Director