

FROM THE EDITORS

*Perhaps our grandsons, having never seen a wild river,
will never miss the chance to set a canoe in singing waters.*

Aldo Leopold

A Sand County Almanac (1949)

Aldo Leopold, father of the modern “land ethic,” wrote this ominous passage at a time when the fate of our nation’s environmental heritage appeared bleak. Most of our federal laws recognizing the non-consumptive values of nature — such as the Endangered Species Act, the Wilderness Act, and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act — did not exist. Leopold’s writings advocated a radical departure from society’s relentless pursuit of blocking, diverting, channeling and dominating natural forces to “benefit” our nation. If he were alive today, Leopold would surely be impressed by two facts: the long way that environmental law and policy have come toward recognizing the biological and psychological importance of nature in a natural state, and the long road yet to be traveled in our social evolution toward the land ethic.

This issue of *Environs* provides a glimpse back into the development of environmental law and policy in the twentieth century, and a look forward to new developments for the twenty-first century. In the first article, **Dennis Michaels** takes us forward to examine the new, high-tech intersection between intellectual property and the environment under “bioprospecting agreements” — agreements that grant private companies exclusive rights to genetic codes of unique organisms found on public lands in exchange for payments and royalties which can fund environmental protection into the future. The next two articles take a look back at historical developments and lessons learned from environmental law and policy of the twentieth century. **Shannon Petersen** provides a retrospective view of laws that protected the nation’s imperiled species before the 1973 Endangered Species Act, and examines the political and social forces that shaped this early wildlife legislation. Finally, **Philip Garone** brings us home to California’s Central Valley to examine the environmental tragedy known as Kesterson Reservoir and the dire consequences that result when political decisionmaking casts aside the inexorable laws of nature.

On a personal note, we would like to thank next year’s Editors in Chief, **Jane Crue** and **David Burnett**, for their assistance in preparing this issue of *Environs*. We also wish to recognize and extend our thanks to **Lena Sims** for her masterful editorial assistance in each of the past four issues of *Environs*.

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