



Aldo Leopold, a Man of His Time and Ours

Aldo Leopold occupies an important place in the history of thinking about land management and conservation. Along with visionaries like Gifford Pinchot and John Muir, his ideas about a culture's land use attitudes and history have provoked widespread discussion and controversy over decades over policy development in the face of the really remarkably profound changes wrought in twentieth century America. Because he was so willing to share his deep reflections, his own life serves as an exemplar of our society's changing approaches to the people/land relationship. *A Sand County Almanac*, published near Leopold's untimely death, gives us a compelling insight into the thinking of a visionary teacher and proponent of a relationship to land and resources that re-contextualizes the critical questions of how we need to frame our notions of responsibility and right living.

Here at HMC, we have another window of insight: the report Leopold produced at the behest of several Club members in 1938. Written a decade or so before *Sand County Almanac*, this report captures Leopold's evolving ideas of valuing land in a deeper, relational way, not limited to relatively short-term economics but rather as endowed with enduring value with a return on investment measured in terms of cultural foundations of intrinsic worth. Indeed, he sees the land relationship as a moral compass, writing in SCA, "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community." (SCA "The Land Ethic"). Let's see how Leopold arrived at this conclusion.

Leopold's early love of the outdoors led him to pursue formal study in land management, and he attended the Yale School of Forestry as a graduate student. This school was founded at Yale by Gifford Pinchot and was one of the very few venues for such study in the US. Pinchot's own ideas about forestry were deeply influenced by European ideas which privileged direct human benefits from the



Photo courtesy of the Aldo Leopold Foundation.

The Huron Mountain Wildlife Foundation turns 70!

The HMWF was created in 1955 by a group of dedicated HMC members who believed in actively promoting scientific investigation on the HMC property. On this 70th anniversary of the founding of the HMWF, we honor the researchers that have made the Foundation thrive, the Huron Mountain Club which has helped with support in innumerable ways, the caretakers who have maintained the facilities and hosted the researchers, the generous donors who have created the Foundation's financial stability, the Board, Officers and advisors who have committed time and energy to overseeing the organization, and especially Kerry Woods, whose commitment and organization has guided the Foundation these many years. Finally, we recognize Aldo Leopold, whose visit to the Huron Mountain Club in 1938 led to his writing the Report on Huron Mountain Club. His visit and the report were pivotal in the creation of the HMWF in 1955. This newsletter honors how his vision shaped the organization's founding.

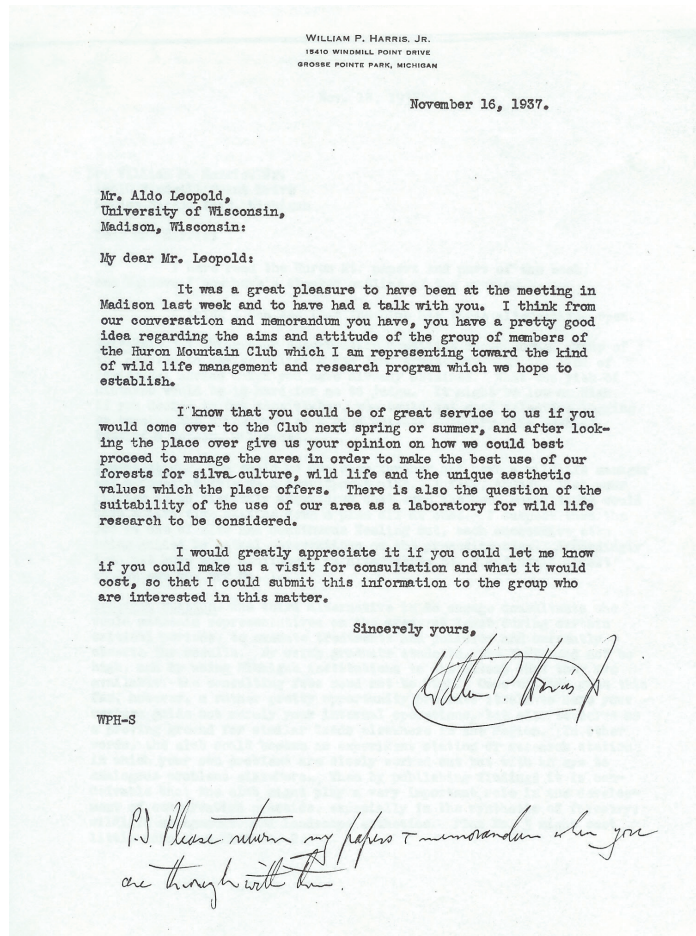


Photo courtesy of the Aldo Leopold Foundation.

land. After Yale, Leopold went to the Southwest working for the very young US Forest Service on the Gila National Forest. While there, he developed his deep appreciation for large undeveloped areas and a sense of dissolving into an unspoiled, fully functioning natural community. Here too he had the formative experience detailed in the essay “Thinking Like a Mountain,” where he watches a wolf wounded by Leopold’s own unprovoked gunfire die still with “a fierce green fire in her eyes.” This essay becomes a parable for people’s destroying what they love most because they have not made the proper correlation between their own impulses and the realities of systemic connections. He writes: “We all strive for prosperity, comfort, long life, and dullness... A measure of success in this is all well enough, and perhaps is requisite to objective thinking, but too much safety seems to yield only danger in the long run.” (SCA, “Thinking Like a Mountain”). What dangers? Loss of viable game populations due to lack of predators, loss of topsoil due to excessive timber harvest and inappropriate conversion of land to agriculture, loss of water quality, loss of biodiversity... the whole panoply of human induced ecological degradation.

When Leopold came to HMC he had moved on from the USFS to the University of Wisconsin, where he was developing the first

formal study of wildlife management. His personal experiences in the wild places of the American West as well as firsthand encounters with land degradation throughout the Midwest stimulated in him a growing sense of the need to preserve examples of relatively intact, functioning ecosystems. We often think about nature as providing environmental services such as air and water purification, waste absorption, or carbon sequestration, for example, and Leopold, like Pinchot, would have agreed to the merit of such recognition. But I think he would also have gone far beyond mere financial valuing to the deeper worth of seeing oneself as part of community with responsibilities to the whole as well as being a beneficiary.

Leopold mentions the truism that “ontogeny repeats phylogeny,” and shares his own life history as he developed from a young hunter, “full of trigger-itch” (“Thinking Like a Mountain”) to a hands-on scholar valuing every component of an ecosystem even if we humans did not immediately see worth in its existence. He notes how his personal values deepen in complexity as he wrestles with human responsibilities in land management. As he matures, he urges an acceptance of the propositional nature of our knowledge and the need for continual research and analysis to inform our understandings and correct our misapprehensions, all the while urging us to be participants in the outdoors and let its glories and mysteries refresh and inspire us.

At the HMC he saw great possibilities based on the existence of a relatively large (especially for the eastern US) parcel of land with many opportunities for in-depth study and documentation of the many levels of bio-geo-chemical connections under the stewardship of a community of people with proven long-term dedication to the place and its multifaceted qualities. He also saw in HMC history the possible evolution to management based less on extractive values and more on appreciation of the land’s unique opportunities for experience and study.

The Huron Mountain Wildlife Foundation’s research and scholarship program underscores Leopold’s prescient appreciation of the HMC. The steady output of peer-reviewed papers confirms the unusual opportunities Club lands offer scientists and members alike and confirms our collective good fortune in being able to walk these lands, paddle and fish these waters, and know this place historically, recreationally, and scientifically. This collective work also brings into focus another of Leopold’s insights: “We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see it as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.” (SCA, 1949). He implicitly challenges us to foster our ties to this place, now many generations appreciated and deeply entwined with family histories, while also fostering a respect for its rare, irreplaceable ecological qualities.



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By Kerry Woods

The annual February 1 “target date” for HMWF research proposal submissions provides a bit of the same sort of suspense as a birthday; we don’t really know what will turn up in the pile of proposed projects. To promote research opportunities at Ives Lake, we rely on widely broadcast RFPs (requests for proposals) and word of mouth, so we don’t know in advance just what will show up. Of course, a good proportion are known quantities – continuing and anticipated projects – but there are always new and sometimes surprising ideas.

In recent years, we’ve stayed pretty stable at around 25 projects accepted each season. That’s typically about what our facilities and resources can support, and that’s what we have for 2025. The list includes a good crop of half-a-dozen new projects. Returning studies range from projects planned for two or three years to open-ended long-term studies, some past their 20th year.

What I find particularly interesting, though, is the spontaneous emergence of “clusters” of related research themes. Perhaps this is just random, or perhaps it’s “something in the air” in the research community. This year, I’m excited to see three geology projects; we’ve had some geological research in the past, but I’ve always felt there was a great deal more potential than we’ve seen realized. These include:

A multi-university group of researchers led by **Andy Breckenridge** (Univ. of Wisconsin-Superior) will study geomorphological patterns related to post-glacial floods through the “Howe-Rush-Pine” spillway. Past research has recognized some fascinating features; this team will use a suite of modern techniques to unify past findings and data from modern methods to produce a more integrated “picture” of this important (and rather bizarre) story.

DONATIONS WELCOME

You can make a donation by mailing a check made out to “Huron Mountain Wildlife Foundation” to:
**Secretary Ted McGraw, Huron Mt. Wildlife Foundation,
71 Links Road, Hobe Sound, FL 33455**

You can also pay by PayPal. Go to hmf.org and click on the “Donate” tab; or go to PayPal and search for “Huron Mountain Wildlife Foundation.”

HMWF is a 501(C)(3) organization and donations are fully deductible.

Gabriel Ahrendt and **Aleksey Smirnov** (Michigan Technological Univ.), working at the “deep-time” end of things, are using paleomagnetic surveys to study pre-Cambrian intrusive features in the hope that this will give insight into ancient tectonic activity – massive rifting – around the Lake Superior basin.

Basil Tickoff and **Annie Bauer** (Univ. of Wisconsin – Madison) are following up on preliminary work last year with a broader mapping and dating survey that will ultimately generate a detailed bedrock geological map of the area.

Other new projects include:

A much-needed baseline documentation of ecosystem status of the main Huron Mt. lakes by **Amy Marcarelli** and **Casey Huckins** (Michigan Technological Univ.). Both researchers are already very familiar with the aquatic systems of the area. Over the next couple of years, they will collect a wide array of chemical, physical, and biological measurements of lake ecosystems that should be invaluable as “baseline” for future monitoring.

Studies of stream chemistry and ecosystem functioning by **Renn Schipper** and **David Costello** (Kent State Univ.). This project builds on previous work at Huron Mt. by Costello’s lab that has generated several important publications.

And two new studies focused on biodiversity documentation. **Cecilia Stokes** (Anne Pringle lab, Univ. of Wisconsin – Madison) will be working to clarify the complex taxonomy and evolutionary relationships of the *Amanita* fungi. **Christopher Heckscher** (Delaware State Univ.) is documenting diversity of fireflies, one of the many understudied insect groups in the area.

To give you a sense of the full scope of HMWF’s 2025 research program, I’ll list ongoing studies more briefly.

- **Doug Ladd** (Missouri Botanical Garden) is in the final year of documenting lichen diversity, including updating collections and lists from Dr. William Manierre’s work and adding his own surveys. This will add a large number of taxa to our biodiversity inventory.
- **Scott Warner** (Michigan Natural Features Inventory) will complete botanical surveys that have already added several dozen species to the known flora of Huron Mt. Club lands.
- **Thomas Werner** (Michigan Technological Univ.) will supplement past studies of drosophilid (fruitfly) diversity.
- **Josh Ness** (Skidmore College) is in the second year of a multi-year project documenting ant diversity and ecology (ants are, rather surprisingly, virtually unstudied in the area).
- **Susan Knight, Paul Schramm, and Carol Warden** (University of Wisconsin Center for Limnology) hope to complete several years of work focused on intensive study of aquatic plant communities across all of the main Huron Mountain lakes.
- **Scott Tiegs** (Oakland Univ.) will maintain long-term studies of stream ecosystem function and decomposer activity.
- **Karen Murchie** (Shedd Aquarium) is in the eighth year of monitoring sucker spawning runs and their environmental correlates as part of large, regional study.

• **Donna Kashian** (Wayne State Univ.) will extend her long-term monitoring of invertebrate communities in area streams, along with surveys of mussel populations in HMC lakes.

• **Dennis Riege** (independent) continues long-term studies of forest dynamics, focusing on the effects of beaver cutting and flooding on hemlock-hardwood forests.

• **Jalene LaMontagne** (Univ. Missouri – St. Louis) is in the 16th year of monitoring reproductive dynamics of conifer species as part of a continent-scale network of study sites.

• **Rose-Marie Muzika** and colleagues will collect critical data from studies of the potential for boulder “refugia” to product sensitive plants from deer browse and provide a source of recolonization by these species.

• **Sarah Johnson, Jill Witt, and Don Waller** (multiple institutions) continue monitoring a large deer-exclosure near Fisher Creek, now in its 16th year, to assess effects of deer browse on forest dynamics and diversity.

• **Julia Burton** (Michigan Tech. Univ.) is continuing studies of relationships between canopy structure and carbon sequestration, building on a network of long-term forest study plots.

• **Ryne Rutherford** (Michigan Tech. Univ.) continues studies of the biota and environments of bedrock “glade” habitats and their biogeographical relationships.

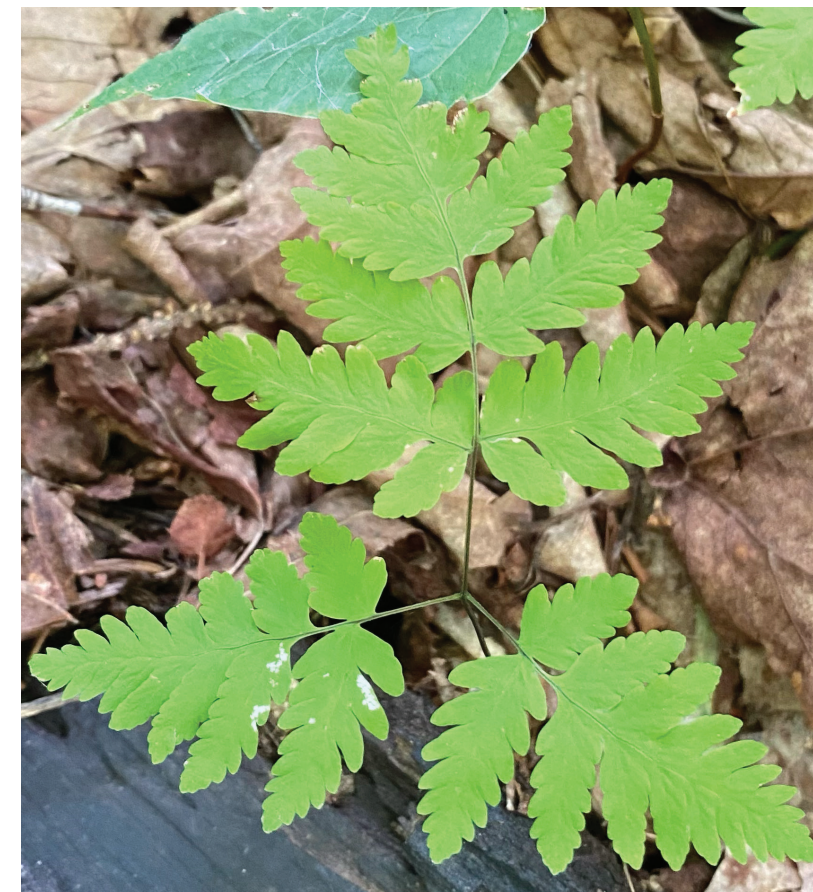
• **Melissa McCormick** (Smithsonian Inst.) is in the 2nd year of a study of the “hologenomes” (i.e., including bacterial and fungal symbionts) of native orchids.

• **Ben Winger and Max Wytinski** (Univ. of Michigan) are in the second year of a project using novel tracking technology to better understand migration habits of breeding songbirds.

• **Ken Hinkel and Fritz Nelson** (Michigan Tech. and Mich. State Univs.) will maintain their network of climatological monitoring station, now in its third decade.

When we circulate our annual call for proposals, research priorities listed include studies for which the “reference ecosystem” status of the Huron Mts. has special importance, studies that take long-term perspectives (and have the potential, with “start-up” support from HMWF, to appeal to major research funding entities), research that is driven by clear questions or hypotheses about the function of the natural systems of the region, and studies that advance documentation of the area’s biodiversity.

I think you can see how this list of projects touches nicely on all of these themes across the full spectrum of field-based sciences. As many as 50 researchers from about 20 institutions in nine states will pass through the Ives Lake Field Station over the course of the season. This speaks to the great potential and appeal of the Huron Mountains as a field laboratory. It also affords great opportunities for cross-fertilization and collaboration from which I expect the emergence of future projects.



From top: Rusty woodsia. Oak fern.

HMWF Keynote Speaker



Emily Sessa is a botanist and plant systematist whose research focuses on the ecology and evolution of ferns and lycophytes. She earned her B.A. in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology from Cornell University in 2005 and her Ph.D. in Botany from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2012. After a year of postdoctoral training in plant genomics at the University of Arizona, she joined the faculty of the Biology Department at the University of Florida in 2013 and received tenure there in 2019. In August 2022, she moved to the New York Botanical Garden, where she is the Director of the William and Lynda Steere Herbarium, one of the world's largest herbaria. She continues to conduct research on fern systematics, historical biogeography, gametophyte physiology, and responses to climate change and mass extinction.

ALL ARE WELCOME!

HMWF Annual Meeting
Tuesday, August 5, 2025 at 4 p.m.
The Playhouse

FERNS, FERNS, FERNS!

Keynote Speaker Dr. Emily Sessa, researcher and Director of the William and Lynda Steele Herbarium at the New York Botanical Garden will be the HMWF's annual meeting speaker. Dr. Emily Sessa, a familiar face at the HMC from her research on ferns with the HMWF 15 years ago, will present a lecture on ferns drawing from her lifetime of research and inspiration.

HURON MOUNTAIN WILDLIFE FOUNDATION



About the Huron Mountain Wildlife Foundation:
Since 1955, the Huron Mountain Wildlife Foundation has supported original research in a wide variety of scientific fields. The research takes place in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. More information on the Foundation can be found at: www.hmwf.org

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We welcome comments and suggestions on this newsletter. Please send them to:

Henry Dykema
67 Vernetti Road
Red Lodge, MT 59068
hbdykema@gmail.com

Editors: Sarah Quiroga and Tiffany Cunningham
Designer: Amanda Micek