

Discovering Alabama

Teacher's Guide

Sipsey Wilderness

Suggested Curriculum Areas

History
Social Studies
Environmental Studies

Suggested Grade Levels

4–12

Key Concepts

Native Wildlands
Land Ethic
Wilderness Values

Key Skills

Research
Communication
Cooperative Learning

Synopsis

This video explores Alabama's Sipsey Wilderness Area and tells about the environmental controversy associated with a citizen campaign to preserve the Sipsey in the 1970s. Efforts to gain federal protection for the Sipsey Wilderness sparked an angry national debate revealing society's conflicting desire both to subdue nature and to preserve nature. The video traces this duality from early civilizations to the present, giving particular focus to the rapid settlement of the American frontier, the counteracting influence of nineteenth-century romanticism, and the emergence of a national movement for the preservation of remaining American wilderness regions. Central to the story are the philosophy and writings of renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold, who championed the cause of wilderness preservation and worked for government protection of the nation's first officially-declared wilderness area.



THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA



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Before Viewing

1. Ask the class to imagine they are among the first colonists to encounter the wondrous early American landscape of forests, rivers, and wildlife—an abundance of natural resources offering both economic and environmental benefits for a new nation. As initial leaders for this new land, they have a unique opportunity to plan in advance, to envision an ideal balance between development and environmental protection, and to set ideal goals for the maintenance of this balance for the nation's future.

To begin planning, they must propose an answer for a very basic question: What portion of America's wildlands should be set aside for permanent wilderness preservation in order to maintain and protect the landscape, plants, and animals in a natural condition undeveloped and undisturbed by humans (except perhaps for nature study and other relatively passive uses)?

2. Allow a few minutes for students to think quietly and to consider how they might answer that question. Remind them that they are pretending to encounter our nation as it was around four hundred years ago, prior to the changes and issues we see today, and that they are to envision the kind of balance between development and preservation that would be appropriate for the nation's future in an ideal world. Mathematically, their task is simply to determine what percentage of the total landscape—from 1 to 100%—they would propose as ideal for wilderness preservation.

3. After students have reflected on this question individually, divide the class into small groups, preferably of four to eight students per group, and have group members work together to agree on a group answer. Record the answers proposed by each group and ask for brief explanations of how and why these percentages were derived. Do not offer your own views or other judgements at this point. Introduce the video by explaining that it deals with similar questions about public lands and wilderness areas in Alabama.

While Viewing

Divide the class into two viewing teams. Team A should include the students who recommended greater land areas for wilderness preservation. Team B should include the students who supported smaller sections of land for preservation. Inform the class that, following the video, the two teams will debate the question of how much land is appropriate for preservation as wilderness in Alabama. Advise them to watch the video carefully for arguments for and against wilderness preservation.

Video Mystery Question: By legal definition, a wilderness preserve should be free of any human disturbance. What item shown in the video appears to violate this rule for the Sipsey Wilderness Area? (Answer: The engraved wilderness dedication monument located by the Sipsey River. Actually, this monument lies along the boundary of the Sipsey Wilderness Area and does not intrude on the wilderness qualities of the area.)

After Viewing

1. Return students to their original groups. Ask the students who recommended the higher quantities for wilderness preservation to develop their arguments in support of plentiful wilderness lands. Ask the students who recommended the lower quantities for wilderness preservation to develop their arguments in support of tighter limits on wilderness areas.

2. Have each group select a student to present the group's arguments to the class. Assemble the debate leaders into opposing debate teams and conduct a formal debate on the following proposition: Additional wilderness preservation in Alabama would be more harmful than beneficial to the state.

3. Have each group develop a list of questions for which they would like further information to improve their debate positions. A better understanding of a controversial issue often requires additional research on all sides of the conflict.

Extensions

1. Assign group research projects pertaining to questions developed in the **After Viewing** activities. Two organizations providing information with differing viewpoints are the Alabama Forestry Association and The Bankhead Monitor (see **Additional References and Resources**).

2. Continue the class wilderness debate by incorporating new data gained through student research and by inviting guest speakers with opposing perspectives.

3. The back page of this Guide includes a number of excerpts from Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*. Have students find the location of these excerpts in the book and discuss the content of these excerpts within their broader context. Then, have students pick their favorite excerpts or chapters to discuss in an essay.

Philosophical Reflections

Aldo Leopold's book *A Sand County Almanac* frequently draws from personal experiences to help pose philosophical questions and observations. The section entitled "Thinking Like a Mountain" describes a western mountain trek during which Leopold and a traveling companion encounter wolves. Leopold recounts the moments after firing his rifle from a mountain side vantage point and killing a mother wolf in the valley below: "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 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 hunter's paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view."

Leopold reflects on this experience to suggest that our knowledge of nature's design is incomplete, that the lives of some wild creatures may hold a deeper purpose and meaning than we readily comprehend. What do you think?

Nature in Art

Many classical music compositions have been inspired by an interest in the natural environment. This was especially true for pieces composed during the Romantic movement of the 18th and 19th centuries. In this video, Edvard Grieg's "Morning Mood" (*Peer Gynt Suite No. 1, Opus 46, 1887–88*) aurally frames our exploration of the natural wonders of the Sipsey Wilderness. The initial melody of "Morning Mood" heard in the opening of the video may sound familiar to some students. It has served as occasional accompaniment in commercial television programs, even in a few cartoons. The last piece of music heard in the video is the less familiar closing melody of this composition, included to remind us of the full richness of the Sipsey Wilderness, as well as the music created during a period in which artistic themes explored the beauties of the natural world. Perhaps your class would enjoy researching contemporary art forms to learn if themes of nature are still explored and to see how these themes have changed or stayed the same since the Romantic period.

Community Connections

1. The early conservation movement in America evolved through dialogue among leaders with differing viewpoints. Three such leaders were John Muir, Gifford Pinchot, and Aldo Leopold. Muir, an ardent naturalist, held the romantic concept of wild nature as a spiritual realm that transcends human society and that should be preserved. Pinchot, on the other hand, based his career as a professional forester on the pragmatic premise that natural resources were to be actively used (though wisely managed) for the various needs of society. When Leopold emerged as a leader for conservation, he was seen by many as a voice of balance, bridging the philosophical with the practical, the scientific with the social, and the ecological with the economic.

Have the students study their community to determine whether or not local organizations—environmental, industrial, governmental, civic, etc.—align more closely with one or another of these three perspectives.

Try to uncover the reasons behind the stance of each organization and how its point of view affects the community's natural environment.

2. Work with local organizations and authorities to trace a general history of changes to the native landscape in your area. With their assistance, explore possibilities for protecting any remaining native wildlands for the future.

Complementary Aids and Activities

Project Learning Tree, Activity Guide, Grades 7–12, "Lovin' It to Death." Teacher training and activity guides available through Alabama Forestry Association, 555 Alabama St., Montgomery AL 36104; 334–265–8733.

Project WILD, Activity Guide, Grades 7–12, 2d edition, "How Many Bears Can Live in this Forest?" and "History of Wildlife Management." Available through Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, 64 N. Union St., Montgomery AL 36130; 334–242–3623.

Take a "walk" in the Sipsey Wilderness with *Walking Sipsey: The People, Places, and Wildlife* by Jim Manasco. Available from the Oakville Indian Mound Park and Museum Gift Shop, P.O. Box 365, Moulton AL 35650; 256–905–2494.

Additional References and Resources

A Sand County Almanac: With Essays on Conservation from Round River by Aldo Leopold (1949 and later editions).

The **Bankhead Monitor** is a nonprofit educational corporation that publishes *Wild Alabama*, a magazine addressing environmental issues affecting the Bankhead National Forest and nearby regions. Contact the Monitor at P.O. Box 117, Moulton AL 35650; 256–974–7678.

The **Alabama Forestry Association** is an organization established in 1949 to serve as "The Voice of Forestry in Alabama." Its

members include commercial forest owners, forest product industries, loggers, etc. For information and educational materials, including the quarterly publication *Alabama Forests*, contact them at 555 Alabama St., Montgomery AL 36104; 334–265–8733.

The Moon of the Bears by Jean Craighead (1993). This is a children's book about black bears in the Great Smokey Mountains.

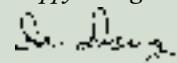
The Romantic Movement by Maurice W. Cranston (1994).

Parting Thoughts

Today we often find a popular environmental emphasis on the promotion of recycling. While this is certainly an important concern, many Americans fail to comprehend the overriding environmental problem of the continuing loss of native ecosystems, habitats, and wild creatures. The time has come for us to consider the need for limiting the endless growth of sprawling suburbs, shopping malls, and highways into the rural landscape. Additionally, the time is overdue for us and for American education to embrace Leopold's concept of a land ethic, and to promote it with all the fervor we can muster. Take a stand—CONSERVE THE LAND!

Oh yeah, I almost forgot. Littering and vandalism are always obnoxious in any area and, of course, should never be committed in a pristine wild area. A more serious threat to wilderness regions is the issue of "loving it to death" whereby well-meaning nature lovers inflict a variety of environmental problems through the overuse of an area. Large group outings and camping trips can cause unavoidable, long-lasting damage, not to mention that lots of people cannot enjoy wilderness solitude together. When visiting a special wild area, the rule is to go gently, go attentively, and go in small numbers.

Happy outings,





Discovering Alabama

Activity/Information Sheet

Sipsey Wilderness

Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* is cherished in some circles as "the Bible" of conservation philosophy. In the first lines of the book, Leopold proclaims that "there are some who can live without wild things, and some who cannot. These essays are the delights and dilemmas of one who cannot." Among the dilemmas of concern to Leopold is modern society's separation from the land, increasingly surrounded by technology and urban environs such that children often grow up having little contact with nature. And as we enter the twenty-first century, Leopold's writings remain absent from most classrooms and unfamiliar to many Americans, possibly because of the very dilemma of which Leopold spoke.

Leopold believed that good education and conservation are inextricably linked and that teaching a land ethic would help

remedy the growing problem of a vanishing natural heritage. The following quotations from his essays express this philosophy:

That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics.

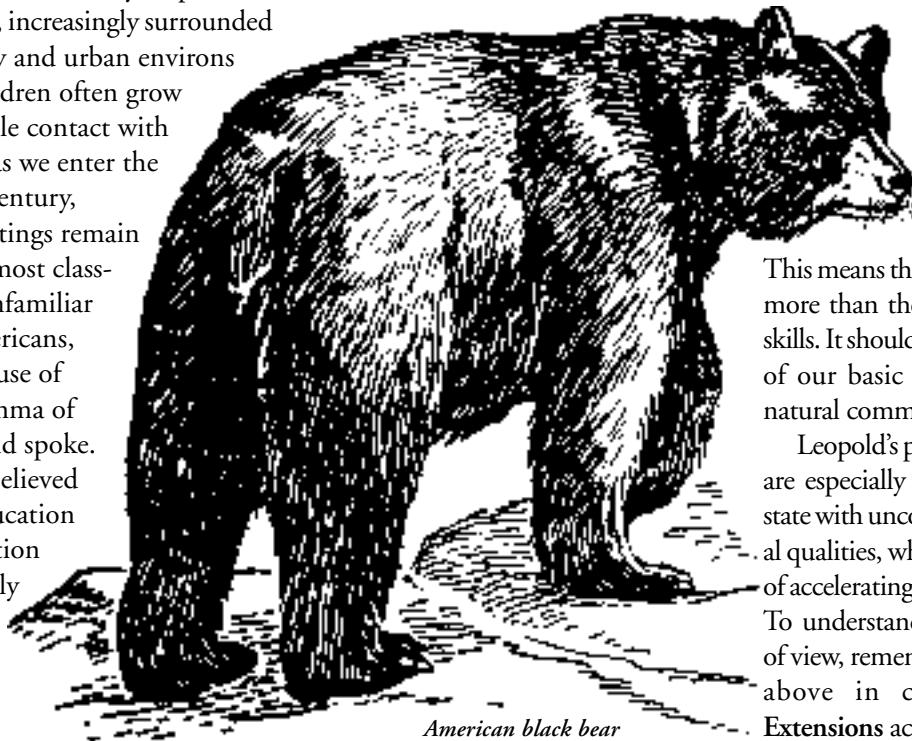
It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value. By value, I, of course, mean something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophical sense.

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.

The last word in ignorance is the man who says of an animal or plant: "What good is it?" If the land mechanism as a whole is good, then every part is good, whether we understand it or not. If the biota, in the course of aeons, has built something we like but do not understand, then who but a fool would discard seemingly useless parts? To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering.

The outstanding scientific discovery of the twentieth century is not television, or radio, but rather the complexity of the land organism.

Perhaps the most serious obstacle impeding the evolution of a land ethic is the fact that our educational and economic system is headed away from, rather than toward, an intense consciousness of land. Your true modern is separated from the land by many middlemen, and by innumerable physical gadgets. He has no vital relation to it; to him it is the space between cities on which crops grow. Turn him loose for a day on the land, and if the spot does not happen to be a golf links or a "scenic" area, he is bored stiff.



American black bear

Aldo Leopold was concerned with the broadest purpose and function of education. He believed in educating for the health of the entire community of life.

This means that good education involves more than the acquisition of academic skills. It should include an understanding of our basic life support system: the natural community around us.

Leopold's philosophy and perspective are especially pertinent for Alabama, a state with uncommonly abundant natural qualities, which we risk losing because of accelerating growth and development. To understand further Leopold's point of view, remember to use the quotations above in conjunction with the Extensions activity number 3.