

Temple teaches, lives Aldo Leopold's legacy



by Barry Adams

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BARABOO — Stanley Temple is hopeful and nowhere near ready to give up his fight for science-based conservation practices and advocacy.

His career has included heated debates about the removal of invasive rabbits and goats that denuded an Indian Ocean island of much of its flora and fauna. There were battles over his recommendation of captive breeding programs to save California condor, and public outcry and death threats to him here in Wisconsin about how to address feral and free-roaming cats that continue to kill millions of songbirds a year.

Temple, who turns 75 later this month, has seen firsthand the impact activists and politicians have had on forming public policy and the continuing denial of climate change despite mountains of evidence, from glaciers that have gradually disappeared to earlier blooming trees and changing schedules for migratory birds.

The past seven years have also been the warmest ever recorded on the planet, according to scientists at NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies.

Meanwhile, many continue to reject masks and vaccines that have proven to be effective in stemming the spread of COVID-19 but will opt for an unproven drug or remedy.

That's why Temple, who from 1976 to 2008 was just the third person to hold a position created for Aldo Leopold in the Department of Wildlife Ecology at UW-Madison, is still speaking out in the name of science.

Leopold held the position from 1933 to 1948, and then it was held by Joseph Hickey from 1948 to 1976. Hickey had studied under Leopold, and besides writing "The Guide to Bird Watching" helped bring Leopold's Sand County Almanac to print in 1949, a year after Leopold's untimely death.

And like Leopold, Hickey and John Muir — another UW-Madison student who grew up in Portage, went on to found the Sierra Club and helped establish Yosemite National Park — Temple has joined the trio and many others in the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame.

'Innate caring for the natural world'

During a tour late last month of the Aldo Leopold Foundation grounds, set amid the 16,000-acre Leopold-Pine Island Important Bird Area in Sauk County, Temple reflected on his own career and how he has tried to uphold the ethics of Leopold in a time of uncertainty.

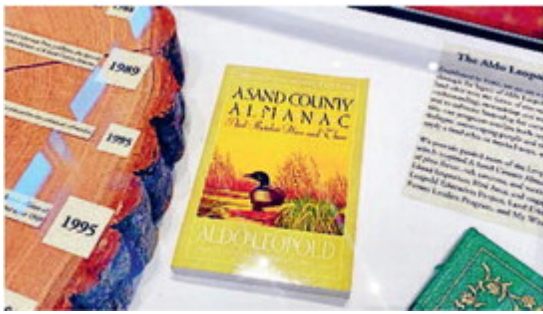
“Throughout my life, literally from the time I was a kid, I sort of had this innate caring for the natural world, which is why I ended up in a career devoted to trying to do what I can to basically help care for the natural world. And I’ve always thought, perhaps somewhat naively, that becoming a scientist and figuring out how the world works was the way to find solutions,” Temple said from a porch just a short walk from where Leopold died of heart attack.

“It didn’t take long to realize that as a scientist my ability to really impact other people’s attitudes toward nature is pretty limited. You can blitz people with all of the facts in the world, you can make an unassailable case as to what the problem is and the solution is, and there will be a part of the population that will simply not believe you or ignore your recommendations because it’s contrary to their worldview,” he said.

Temple, who lives in Madison but for years had a home on 90 acres of land near Mazomanie, has been a science adviser to the Aldo Leopold Foundation’s board since 1982 and is one of the charter members of Wisconsin’s Green Fire: Voices for Conservation. The organization was founded in 2017 to promote science-based practices and a long-term vision in environmental protection and natural resources management. The name of the organization comes from Leopold, who in his younger years had shot a wolf in Arizona and saw “the fierce green fire dying in her eyes,” Leopold wrote.



Stanley Temple’s connection to Aldo Leopold is strong. Seen here in Leopold’s shack at the Aldo Leopold Foundation near Baraboo, Temple spent 32 years in a position at UW-Madison that was created for Leopold in 1933. Temple has adhered to Leopold’s ethics on conservation throughout his more than 50-year career and was inducted in 2020 into the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame. BARRY ADAMS PHOTOS, STATE JOURNAL



Aldo Leopold's "A Sand County Almanac" was published in 1949, a year after Leopold's death. In one of the book's essays, Leopold makes an appeal for moral responsibility to the natural world.

For Temple the power of research and his storytelling ability are keeping him busy. His schedule this month included talks with a Wisconsin Master Naturalists group, a presentation during a naturalists program at Willow River State Park, a speaking engagement with the St. Croix River Management Water District in Hudson and another with the Wisconsin Woodland Owners Association based in Stevens Point.

In 2014, he did presentations and wrote articles during the 100th anniversary of the passenger pigeon's extinction; he's retracing the steps of Leopold's game survey from 1928 to 1931 of the Upper Midwest and continues to teach and mentor students through the Leopold Foundation and as an emeritus professor at UW-Madison.

"I long ago figured out that my ability to be a good storyteller is probably the most effective way that I can get to the general public," Temple said. "This is my passion."

From an early age

As a child Temple was mentored by the author Rachel Carson, who wrote "Silent Spring" and who was a member of Temple's Audubon club. When Temple was 11, he saved more than a dozen box turtles from woods that were being bulldozed for a housing development, and in junior high school he began practicing falconry.

Temple worked at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History in high school and attended Cornell University, where he studied under one of Leopold's graduate students and earned his Ph.D. in 1972 while studying at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

While with the World Wild-life Fund in the early 1970s, he was hired to launch programs for critically endangered birds on several islands in the Indian Ocean before coming to Madison in 1976 as a faculty member in UW-Madison's Department of Forest and Wildlife Ecology in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. More than 10,000 students have taken one or more of Temple's courses, and his research work has taken him to 21 countries.

“Dr. Temple’s scholarship and voluminous scientific contributions have helped reshape the entire field of wildlife ecology and management,” said Buddy Haffaker, executive director of the Aldo Leopold Foundation, founded in 1982. “In fact, it is difficult to identify one single contribution as being the most significant given the breadth and depth of his work.”

The foundation is home to Leopold’s famed shack, a former chicken coop that served as a weekend retreat where Leopold and his family, beginning in 1935, cut wood, tended a garden and over the years planted thousands of trees. And while Temple is well versed in the shack’s history, in 2015 he spent time in search of the site where in 1926 Leopold bought a shanty along the Current River. Leopold thought it was in Missouri, but by using old photos and a little detective work, Temple found the spot just over the border in Arkansas.

Refueling hope

Temple is using a folding German-made kayak he purchased in 1961 to retrace the journey of Lewis and Clark.

Temple estimates he has paddled about 800 miles over the years, which has included not only the Missouri River but side trips the expedition took up rivers such as the Yellowstone on the North Dakota-Montana border and the Niobrara in northern Nebraska.

For Temple, the paddles have provided cleansing breaks and rejuvenation to continue his conservation journey in the face of long odds and opposition.

“I’m a hopeful person. A hopeful person knows the odds are stacked against them, but they’re willing to give it their best shot. So I’m hopeful that we can turn things around,” Temple said.

“I’m not optimistic. There’s no way you can be optimistic about the future the way things are going,” he said. “I’m not a pessimist either. A pessimist knows it’s all over so why even bother. So being hopeful keeps me going, as I suppose it did Aldo Leopold. He faced a lot of opposition in his time, too.”

Barry Adams covers regional news for the Wisconsin State Journal. Send him ideas for On Wisconsin at 608-252-6148 or by email at badams@madison.com.



*The visitor center and museum at the Aldo Leopold Foundation is one of the greenest buildings in the world, built with timbers harvested from Leopold's former farmland. Stan Temple, right, has been a science adviser for the foundation's board of directors since 1982. **BARRY ADAMS, STATE JOURNAL***



*Aldo Leopold wrote of the ethical relationship between people and nature in "A Sand County Almanac." **STATE JOURNAL ARCHIVES***



*Stanley Temple walks toward Aldo Leopold's shack near Baraboo. There were few trees here in 1935 when Leopold converted a former chicken coop into a weekend and seasonal home. Over the years, the Leopold family planted thousands of trees on the property. **BARRY ADAMS, STATE JOURNAL***



*Stanley Temple grew up in Cleveland and as a young boy became interested in wildlife and conservation. After graduating from Cornell University, he went to work with the World Wildlife Fund before joining the faculty at UW-Madison, where he spent 32 years in the Department of Wildlife Ecology. **BARRY ADAMS, STATE JOURNAL***



*Aldo Leopold walks down the steps of his Arkansas hunting shanty in this 1930s photograph. **STANLEY TEMPLE***

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