

## Conservation Matters

*A monthly column focused on conservation education, as the result of collaboration among several area conservation commissions and organizations. If your town's commission or conservation organization would like to contribute articles, please contact Jessica Tabolt Halm [jesshalm78@gmail.com](mailto:jesshalm78@gmail.com)*

**Title:** What is a Conservation Ethic?

**Written by:** Campton Conservation Commission

As conservation commissioners, we are often asked, "What do you mean by conservation?" At first, this question seems a little silly to us, since the word has been a part of our vernacular for so long, but it quickly becomes apparent that many of our community members are unclear about what the term conservation means. Does it mean "locking up" our forests so they can't be logged or hunted?

An idea that we often toss around in conversations is that of having a "conservation ethic". We say we have a conservation ethic, as stewards of our town's natural resources. We say we are hoping to assist landowners with a conservation ethic in protecting their lands from harmful development. The notion of a conservation ethic was first made "famous" by Aldo Leopold in his 1949 book, [A Sand County Almanac](#). The ethics articulated in this book draw a distinct diversion from preservation, where land is set aside and left untouched. Conservationists often engage in managing land for sustainable timber harvesting or food production, or participate in activities steeped in tradition like hunting, while still honoring the land's intrinsic value and the many benefits it provides for humans and wildlife alike.

In order to have a conservation ethic, however, one does not have to follow suit with Aldo Leopold, hunting ducks across the plains of Wisconsin. Conservationists can have many faces, and preservationists certainly fall within the broader category of conservation. As commissioners considering lands for conservation, one of the highest priorities is to honor the goals and desires of the landowners seeking to conserve their property.

Our hope is to highlight a few of the many ways in which people can hold a conservation ethic. The stories below highlight five individuals who all display this ethic:

Leah is a 90-something year old woman who, until very recently, held ownership of her childhood home. She has fond memories of playing and exploring the woods and river near this home with older, knowledgeable people in her community, including F. Schuyler Mathews. As the time for her to move to nursing home care was drawing near, she desperately wanted to ensure that others could enjoy the forest and river as she had, and that the land would be cared for by others with similar values. She donated her land to the town for permanent use as a natural area, with nature trails for public use and access to the river for wildlife viewing, fishing and swimming. Leah has a conservation ethic.

David spent much of his adult life working as college professor in an urban area. As he and his wife were preparing to retire, they knew they wanted to slow their pace of life down and spend time unwinding on a piece of property that they could call home. They purchased enough land to be able to sustainably manage timber, as well as grow some of their own food and regularly explore the land and all of its natural wonders on foot,

snowshoes, or skis. He and his wife make a point to invite their neighbors to do the same. David has a conservation ethic.

Greg has a young daughter and has recently become a first-time home owner. He spent his childhood and young adult life cruising the woods, scouting for the best places to sit and wait for a “big buck” to stroll through and fill his family’s freezer for the winter. His forays taught him much about the woods and its changing seasons. He also loves to ice fish and hunt turkeys, thereby expanding his opportunities to be outside and harvest food at the same time. His best memories in the woods have little to do with actual hunting or fishing details, however, but rather the many zany things he has seen squirrels and chipmunks do while he has been sitting in his tree stand waiting for the big one. Now he shares these moments with his daughter. Greg has a conservation ethic.

Jess and her husband have a young family, and decided early on in their marriage to schedule their working lives around their family goals and commitment to producing food for themselves and their local community members. Their oversized basement with growing lights installed, as well as a recently erected a hoop house makes it possible to grow food year-round. They are committed to organically raising this food and several score ducks and chickens for meat and egg production. They are diligent about their farming practices being harmonious with the environment. Jess and Dan have a conservation ethic.

Ted spends much of his spare time climbing, trail running or hiking. He loves exploring new trails, and plans extended, several week trips for doing just this. He finds joy in observing nature and using it as his gym. He believes that the value of natural, undeveloped lands is less in what products it can provide for us, and more in the feelings of spiritual renewal that comes when a person spends some time “unplugged” and outdoors. Ted has a conservation ethic.

Your own conservation ethic may look similar to one or more of those highlighted above. Or it may take an entirely different shape. Ultimately, when a person values open space, wild lands, they can form a bond with another conservation-minded person, regardless of whether or not their conservation ethic looks the same.

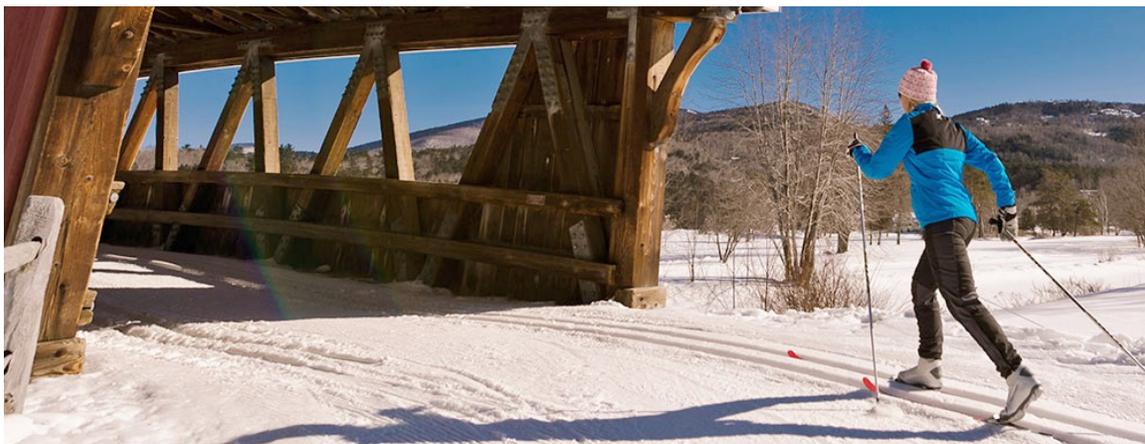


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**Photo caption:** Though the lifestyle choices of the individuals depicted in the three photos above differ greatly, all of them have a conservation ethic; that is, a general sense of care and appreciation for open space lands.