

Generations on the Land: A Conservation Legacy. By Joe Nick Patoski. 2011. Sand County Foundation/Texas A&M University Press, College Station, TX, USA. 136 p. US\$25. hardcover. ISBN 978-1-60344-241-1.

Aldo Leopold, forest ranger and America's seminal wildlife biologist, was ultimately an agrarian, nursing a farm back to health while producing food and wildlife—as well as developing the Land Ethic put forward in *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (1949), the philosophical underpinning of the natural resources field. Thus it is fitting that the Sand County Foundation's Leopold Conservation Awards showcase, and invest in, private landowner conservation achievement. *Generations on the Land* presents the stories of eight Leopold Award-winning families that have embraced the Land Ethic, representing seven of the eight Western and Midwestern states where the award is given: a timber business in Wisconsin, a vineyard in California, and three ranches on the Great Plains and three in the Rocky Mountains (which depended on public land). The book adds to the existing popular literature profiling agrarian land stewardship, and comparison of the profiles indicates some common threads.

The stories emphasize love of land and sustainability as a way of life, suggesting that daily engagement with nature through work tends to lead to a sense of impermanence, and independence as well as interdependence. The operations used various tools—Leopold's "axe, cow, plow, fire, and gun"—to steward their resources; grazing was an especially important tool for rangeland improvement. Perhaps most important were planning and partnerships, followed by teaching, sharing, and hospitality; at least five of the eight operations were involved in public service. They may have been independent, but they were involved and committed.

The operations were learning organizations practicing adaptive management, though neither of those terms is used in the text. Six of the eight profiles mentioned college education, with the managers having degrees in animal science, agribusiness, and advertising—but not range management. The logger had enrolled in a state-sponsored sustainable forestry program, and at least one of the ranchers had training in holistic management.

Enterprise diversification was clearly important to at least half of the operations. Three emphasized horizontal diversification, including multiple-species grazing and wildlife enterprises; four emphasized vertical integration, including natural beef, a sawmill, and a winery. None had more than a few enterprises, however. All six ranches emphasized wildlife habitat management, regardless of explicit involvement in wildlife enterprises.

All of the families had multiple generations in agriculture, though not always on the same land, with one exception who bought the ranch from his mentor. No stories featured anyone buying a ranch without a background in agriculture. However, the author's pervasive emphasis on multigenerational families leaves the reader wondering if it was a precondition for the award, or simply the author's bias (note the title). Other profiles of progressive ranchers have noted that it may be easier for an outsider to be an innovator. Multigenerational ownership reduces the supply of available land, forming a barrier to entry into agriculture by aspiring farmers and ranchers—a generation well-educated, familiar with conservation, and steeped in the Land Ethic.

Most if not all ranches bred cattle to fit their environment, and used some form of planned grazing, which is consistent with other books profiling progressive ranchers. However, details are few and inconsistent. Three profiles indicated rotational grazing (27 and 30 pastures, >100 miles of fence), another mentioned cross-fencing, another herding sheep, and one had no information on grazing management—or on what basis the ranch had won the award.

Natural resources professionals nominate and evaluate each state's award contenders, so it is not surprising that the winners had good relationships with government agencies. At least two ranches participated in Natural Resources Conservation Service conservation programs, two had conservation easements, and the vineyard had a safe harbor agreement for an endangered species. None emphasized conflict or property rights.

In short, the stories are engaging but data are lacking. The stories indicated that the land had improved, but not always by what mechanisms or even how improvement was defined and measured. Nevertheless, the book adds to the mounting popular literature indicating that with a Land Ethic, good planning, and adaptive management, agriculture—especially ranching—can yield the public good of conservation.

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