

Conservation Conversations

'Conservation conversations' is a new series brought to you by the Middle Park Conservation District. Its intent is to explore a variety of conservation-related topics that get people thinking and talking about the natural world we live in.

We begin the series with a conversation on the **History of Conservation and Why It's Important.**

It was the legacies of John Muir, Gifford Pinchot, and Aldo Leopold that made the greatest impacts on conservation today. John Muir and Gifford Pinchot, though both great environmentalists, had very different views on the way nature should be protected. Muir believed nature should be preserved in a pristine state where man is but a visitor who does not interfere with natural processes and leaves no trace behind once gone. He cherished nature solely for its aesthetic beauty and intrinsic value. Pinchot, on the other hand, believed nature should be sustainably used by man and is most well-known for his platform of, *"yielding the greatest good, for the greatest number, for the longest run."* He respected nature for its economic value in the present and for generations to come. If you think about today's federal land agencies, the National Park Service and the National Wilderness Areas more closely align with Muir's Preservation Ethic, while the US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management fall under Pinchot's Conservation Ethic.

Aldo Leopold came to the forefront of the conservation movement in the mid-1900s with his idea known as the "Land Ethic". Leopold realized that humans are not distinctly separate from the non-human world around us. He believed that people and nature should be viewed as one big community and that *"The role of Homo sapiens should be changed from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it."*

So, why exactly, is conservation important?

Gifford Pinchot once said, *"Without natural resources, life itself is impossible. From birth to death, natural resources, transformed for human use, feed, clothe, shelter, and transport us. Upon them we depend for every material necessity, comfort, convenience, and protection in our lives."* This is very true. Through the evolutionary process, modern humans have lost nearly all the physiological capabilities to truly survive on our own, in the most primitive and animalistic sense.

Aldo Leopold was also correct when he said, *"A system of conservation based solely on economic self-interest is hopelessly lopsided. It tends to ignore, and thus eventually to eliminate, many elements in the land community that lack commercial value, but that are essential to its healthy functioning. It assumes, falsely, I think, that the economic parts of the biotic clock will function without the uneconomic parts."*

In other words, conservation is important because in order to sustain a healthy ecosystem, of which we (as humans) are a part, we must conserve all aspects of the ecosystem. It's the foundation of a symbiotic relationship—if we help the land, the land will help us.

Check out the Middle Park Conservation District by visiting our website www.middleparkcd.com, calling our office at 970.724.3456, or emailing us at middleparkcd@gmail.com.