
ALDO STARKER LEOPOLD: 1913-1983

News of Starker's death reached me at a time when I was preparing a paper on "What's natural in wilderness fire management." When the shock wore off slightly, the first thought that occurred to me was, "Damn! We'd hoped to see him this fall in Missoula; but we knew he had quail hunting plans in Mexico that interfered. And now this!" My second thought was, "We need him again, just now, as we're trying to clarify our thinking on what's appropriate in both national parks and wilderness areas."

What was it about Starker Leopold that makes me feel this way? In part it was how much we--the National Park Service as an agency and many of us as individuals--have already received from the man--in his reports, publications, and personal contacts. Perhaps more than that, it was the spirit of the man, expressed in both the grandeur of his views and at the same time their commonness: he related habitat needs of elk and bear to human needs. He could view things from the mountain top. Like the eye of an eagle, he often put things into perspective for the rest of us. Somehow he knew how to get to the heart of an issue, without getting lost in the trivia--a rare talent.

I have a copy of the "Leopold Report" of 1963 on Wildlife Management in the National Parks in front of me, and I'm reminded of just how significant that document was to development of the major change in National Park Service fire management policy in 1968 and the subsequent changes in programs in many park areas as well as other Government Agencies. These included Sequoia and Kings Canyon, Yosemite, Grand Teton, Yellowstone, as well as the earlier programs in Everglades National Park which received added impetus from the report by Starker and a committee of four other talented men. Two decades later, by means of a June 9, 1983 letter he wrote to Boyd Evison, Superintendent of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks in California, Starker was still deeply involved in helping the National Park Service deal with several difficult ecological and philosophical questions related to management decisions and fire management policy.

In their report to Interior Secretary Stewart Udall, Starker and his associates quoted a brief document on management of National Parks from the First World Conference on National Parks in 1962, which included several points that serve as prelude to significant conclusions of their own report. Three major points were that (1) few of the world's parks are large enough to be self-regulating ecological units; (2) in successional communities, it is necessary to manage the habitat (with fire in East African open savanna as an example); and (3) management based on scientific research is not only desirable but often essential.

Going on from this, the 1963 "Leopold Report" noted as a primary goal that "biotic associations within each park be maintained, or where necessary recreated, as nearly as possible in the conditions that prevailed when the area was first visited by the white man. A National Park should represent a vignette of primitive America." Starker and his committee made clear that many human modifications of the environment had led to park biotic associations being artifacts which badly needed restoration.

Starker was characteristically pragmatic in his approach to solving this problem. He felt that, "Management may at times call for use of the tractor, chainsaw, rifle, or flame thrower" in the efforts to restore the primitive scene. And he had no illusions about it being easy. Yet in his dynamic and convincing way, he felt that, "...if the goal cannot be fully achieved it can be approached. A reasonable illusion of primitive America could be recreated using the utmost in skill, judgment, and ecologic sensitivity." And he felt this should be the objective of every National Park and Monument.

He strongly supported the controlled use of fire as the most "natural" method of manipulating vegetation, and he equally strongly supported the need for scientific research as the basis for all management programs. As the Chief Scientist of the National Park Service in 1967-1968, Starker felt that "Management without knowledge would be a dangerous policy indeed." His overriding philosophical approach, however, was that "Above all other policies, the maintenance of naturalness would prevail."

In the more recent discussion in his letter of June 9, 1983, he again shared his practical approach to solving difficult management issues. On the question of natural vs. aboriginal ignition of fires in National Parks, Starker commented, "If an area is ready to burn, it makes little difference to me whether the fire is set by lightning, by an Indian, or set by Dave Parsons [the Park's research scientist], so long as the result approximates the goal of perpetuating a natural community...Our parks are too small in area to relegate to the forces of nature that shaped a continent...Management issues of this kind involve judgment, followed by action. They are not resolved simply by 'allowing natural ecosystem processes to operate.' I still espouse the idea of active manipulation to maintain a more or less natural aspect to the park as seen by the visitor...(It is OK to manage the backcountry as wilderness, as per Hendee et al, but the foreground should not be left to chance)...As I recall, this is what we were trying to say in that report to Secretary Udall so long ago."

Sometimes called a biopolitician, because of the time he devoted to committee reviews of thorny technical and professional issues within various agencies of Government, Starker's advice was sought widely by Secretaries of the Interior and particularly

Assistant Secretarys for Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, who supervise the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service. He became a close friend of many of these men and offered them sound advice on matters dealing with wildlife conservation and National Parks from his perspective as a scientist and member of the faculty of the University of California for nearly four decades. Starker joined the faculty of the University of California in 1946 after obtaining his Ph.D. in Zoology from the same University.

Starker Leopold was born in 1913 in Burlington, Iowa to Aldo and Estella Leopold. His famous father is known as the father of Game Management. He is survived by his wife, Betty, two children, Frederick and Sarah, three grandchildren, and by his brothers Luna and Carl and sisters Estella and Nina. He was author of many books and professional articles dealing with various aspects of wildlife management, including *Wildlife of Mexico*, *Wildlife in Alaska* and *Game Birds and Animals in California*.

Starker Leopold left an indelible impression on the wildlife profession (he was a past president of The Wildlife Society), the National Park Service's resources management policies in general, and its fire management policy specifically, and on a broad range of graduate students, associates, and friends who came to know him and benefit by their association with him. He was a great man, and yet a close friend as well to many of us. We'll miss him very much. And we appreciate even more what he has added to the quality of life of all mankind--now and in the future.

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