

Leopold Conservation Award lesson

Grade Levels

9-12

Estimated time

Two 40-minute sessions

Materials needed

Computer, internet,
projector

Purpose

This lesson introduces students to the Leopold Conservation Award and reinforces foundational knowledge about best management practices. At the end of the lesson, students will be able to summarize the outstanding and award-winning efforts of one Leopold Award Winner with supporting evidence.

Introduction


The inaugural Illinois Leopold Conservation Award was presented to the Frey Family Farms at the Farm Progress Show in late August 2023. This annual, award honors individuals or families that exemplify conservation in agriculture. The producers, operations, and conservation practices vary by year and state but passion and commitment to enhance the natural resources of their land unite all award recipients. This lesson introduces students to the rich tradition of the Leopold Conservation Award program and sends students into investigation and reflection with a choice-based research project.

Suggested Sequence

1. Hook
 - a. Pose introductory questions to class: “Have you ever seen or do you watch award shows? Which one? Why do you watch it or why do you care about the award?”
 - b. Connect the award examples and reasons students care about those awards to the Leopold Conservation Award that recognizing farmers and ranchers for their conservation efforts.
2. Build background knowledge with a short introduction to Aldo Leopold, the well-known conservationist and author, and the award given in his name, the Leopold Conservation Award. Key points to highlight:
 - a. Who is Aldo Leopold?

“Considered by many to be the father of wildlife ecology and the United States’ wilderness system, Aldo Leopold was a conservationist, forester, philosopher, educator, writer, and outdoor enthusiast. Among his best-known ideas is the “land ethic,” which calls for an ethical, caring relationship between people and nature” (Aldo Leopold Foundation). See the [short biography by the Aldo Leopold Foundation](#) for more information.
 - b. What is the Leopold Conservation Award?

“The Leopold Conservation Award Program recognizes agricultural landowners actively committed to a land ethic.



Sand County Foundation, national sponsor American Farmland Trust and several prominent state conservation partners, present the prestigious honor, which consists of \$10,000 and a crystal award, in settings that showcase the landowners' achievements among their peers" (Sand County Foundation). See the Sand County Foundation [award description](#) for more information.

3. Distribute video handout (see [Appendix A](#)) for students to complete notes as the Leopold Conservation Award Story video plays or to use as a discussion guide following the video. Play the 5-minute [the Leopold Conservation Award Story video](#). After the video, lead or support small group or class discussion related to the questions in the worksheet.
4. Now that students have background information on the award, introduce the choice-based research project and distribute project handouts which includes project directions, guiding questions, and rubric (see [Appendix B](#)). This can be an in-class activity or homework.
5. Following the completion of projects, have each student present or play their project to you or the class.
6. Closing
 - a. Highlight key takeaways from lesson including Aldo Leopold's legacy, the response of Leopold Conservation Award winners, and why conservation matters.

Extend the Lesson

Prior to this lesson, you can introduce your students to conservation agriculture and best management practices. See our ["What is conservation agriculture?" lesson](#) featured in the initial 2023 issues of the [AIM Illinois newsletter](#).

This lesson can also be extended by adding instruction or a reading activity regarding the Leopold Conservation Award. See the Issues 3 & 4 2023 of the AIM newsletter for student reading material and for more information regarding this topic.

Recommended Companion Resources

[Brief Aldo Leopold biography](#) by The Aldo Leopold Foundation, [The Leopold Conservation Award Story video](#) by the Sand County Foundation, and [Leopold Conservation Award Program information](#) by the Sand County Foundation.

Acknowledgements

Resources referenced are provided by The Aldo Leopold Foundation and Sand County Foundation.

Author

Kathryn Thuestad, Education and Outreach Coordinator with the IDOA/NRCS Capacity Building Initiative

Appendix A

Video Handout

Name _____

Leopold Conservation Award – [Video](#) Handout

1. ____ of the land of the United States is under private ownership.
Why does this matter to conservation?

2. Conservation practices on private land affects our _____, _____,
_____, and _____.

3. Aldo Leopold recognized the disconnect between _____
_____ and _____
_____.

4. Award recipients featured in the video are from these states:

5. What are your main takeaways about:
How the recipients felt about receiving the Leopold Conservation Award?

Why producers choose to focus on conservation within agriculture?

Name ANSWER KEY

Leopold Conservation Award – [Video](#) Handout

1. 3/4 of the land of the United States is under private ownership.
Why does this matter to conservation?
Answers may vary. One correct answer would be: Anyone trying to advance conservation efforts must work with private land owners (often farmers and ranchers) to protect our natural resources.

2. Conservation practices on private land affects our **water, land, air, and wildlife.**

3. Aldo Leopold recognized the disconnect between **consumers with their final product** and **producers and what happens on the land to get that product.**

4. Award recipients featured in the video are from these state:
Utah – Brent Tanner
Colorado – Russell Davis
California – Dino Giacomazzi
Wisconsin – Jim Hebbe
Nebraska – Homer Buell
Texas – Sarah Mitchell
South Dakota – Todd Mortenson

5. What are your main takeaways about:
How the recipients felt about receiving the Leopold Conservation Award?
Answers will vary.

Why producers choose to focus on conservation within agriculture?
Answers will vary.

Video Handout [PDF file](#) and [PPT file](#)

Appendix B

Project Handout and Rubric

Name _____


Leopold Conservation Award – Project

Now that you've been introduced to the Leopold Conservation Award, you will continue learning about the award criteria, the process, and the many recipients. The goal of this independent research project is to understand and explain the outstanding and award-winning efforts of one Leopold Award Winner with supporting evidence.


Directions

1. Start researching the [Leopold Conservation Award](#) and recipients throughout the years and throughout the US.
2. Choose an award recipient you would like to focus your project on and answer the questions on page 2.
3. Choose your project type and complete your project following the guidelines in the rubric on page 3. Be sure to include citations.


Project Choices




Slide – Create a slide that effectively describes your Leopold Conservation Award winner. This should feature brief text and helpful visual(s). The slide should highlight the key points you will present to the class.



Fact Sheet – Design a single-page fact sheet that effectively describes your Leopold Conservation Award winner. This should be easy to read and visually interesting. The fact sheet should highlight the key points you will present to the class.



Video – Create a 3-7 minutes video presentation that effectively describes your Leopold Conservation Award winner. This should include helpful audio and visual content. The video will be played in class as your presentation.



Podcast – Create a 3-7 minutes audio presentation that effectively describes your Leopold Conservation Award winner. This should include helpful audio and visual content. The podcast will be played in class as your presentation.

1

Name _____

Required Questions (answer all 3)

1. What is the name of the farmer(s) or farm that won the award? What year and what state did the recipients win the award in?
2. What kind of farming, ranching, forestry, etc. operation do the winners run?
3. What conservation practices are used on this operation?

Additional Questions (choose at least 2)

1. What criteria did the award winners meet? (Hint: see award criteria and award applications for each state for clues. Additional information may be in winner announcement press releases.)
2. Where did or does the award winner's passion for conservation come from?
3. What is the main take-away or lesson that you learned after learning about this award and this award recipient?
4. If you were a producer in your area, what conservation practice would you implement on the operation of your choice and why? (this builds off of previous lesson about best management practices)

2

Name _____

Leopold Conservation Award – Project Rubric

	5 points	3 points	1 points
Creativity and effort	The student clearly put an extreme amount of effort and creativity into their work! Well Done!	The student put a reasonable amount of effort and creativity into their work. Nice job!	The student chose to quickly complete the work without much effort or creativity.
Presentation	The student holds audience attention seldomly hesitates. They speak clearly and at an appropriate volume.	The student frequently pauses and/ or occasionally uses filler words. Their volume is satisfactory.	The student consistently uses filler words. They are unclear and speak at a low volume.
	3 points	2 points	1 points
Project choice	The student chose an approved project and met all the criteria listed on page 1.	The student chose an approved project and met some criteria.	The student didn't meet the criteria of an approved project.
Required Question #1	The student thoroughly answers this question. They clearly state the recipient with their state and award year.	The student partially answers this question.	The student does not answer this question. They do not introduce the recipient.
Required Question #2	The student uses helpful descriptors to describe the farming operation and answer the question.	The student simply answers this question.	The student does not answer this question. They do not mention the recipient's type of operation.
Required Question #3	The student thoroughly answers this question. They list and describe conservation practices used at this operation.	The student answers this question. They list conservation practices used.	The student does not answer this question. They do not list or describe conservation practices used.
Additional Questions	The student thoroughly answered at least 2 questions.	The student answered 1 question.	The student does not answer any of these questions.

/25 possible points

3

Project handout and rubric [PDF file](#) and [PPT file](#)