

Film captures life and legacy of conservationist Leopold

By Kathryn Reed

Condensing any man's life and his legacy to 72 minutes would be difficult. Doing that for Aldo Leopold was even more challenging because of the significant contributions he made to conservation efforts in the United States.



In his lifetime that spanned from 1887 to 1948 Leopold became known as the father of wildlife ecology. He started working for the U.S. Forest Service in 1909, four years after the agency was formed.

Ann and Steve Dunsky were tasked with creating a film that captures who Leopold was and the mark he left on society. "Green Fire" will be shown at Lake Tahoe Community College on March 28.

"We initially started with community, which is the central theme to Leopold. Where we ended up was on his most important idea which is the land ethic," Steve Dunsky told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Leopold wrote, "That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics. A land ethic, then, reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for the health of land."

Despite Leopold's impact, the Duskys note that the majority of people have never heard of him. This fact required delicate editing by Ann Dunsky to combine enough biography about the

man and the essence of why his work is relevant today so movie-goers will know who the film is about and the importance of his work.

Steve Dunsky is the producer/director of the film, while Ann Dunsky is the editor. The husband-wife duo has been working for the Forest Service in this capacity for more than 20 years. Some of their films are their ideas; some are ideas that get handed down through the agency.

“Green Fire” is like a sequel to their earlier film “Greatest Good”. That film, which was a history of the USFS, was completed in 2005.

“Green Fire” is a partnership between the USFS and the Aldo Leopold Foundation. The latter funded the project and wanted the emphasis to be on the legacy of their namesake. The Forest Service provided the Duskys and equipment for the making of the film.

The film debuted in February 2011, with it coming to PBS stations later this year or early 2013. It has been shown in 17 countries, with more than 600 screenings in that time.

The name of the film has multiple meanings. For one, Leopold wrote about how his beliefs toward wildlife and the environment changed after he watched the green fire in a wolf’s eye extinguish after he had killed it.

Another tie to the name is the worldwide green movement. The third is how fire itself can be green.

“We need fire, especially in the Western U.S., to have properly functioning ecosystems,” Steve Dunsky said. “The Lake Tahoe Basin is very much aware of fire and ecosystems.”

The Duskys will be in Tahoe for the local screening for a Q&A/discussion after the movie. (They work out of the regional USFS office in Vallejo.)

They said they've been pleasantly surprised by the reaction to the film and the number of entities which want to show it.

"Ultimately the science will only get us so far and politicians will get us only so far. It gets down to discussions about what we value," Steve Dunsky said. "We need to find common ground and move forward. For too long we have been stuck in a morass of lawsuits and bickering. That doesn't help the land any."

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Movie info: Lake Tahoe premiere of "Green Fire" will take place at the Duke Theatre at Lake Tahoe Community College, One College Drive, South Lake Tahoe on March 28. Doors open at 6:30pm, and the film begins at 7pm. Admission is free. Filmmakers Ann and Steve Dunsky will be available to answer questions after the screening.