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## Introduction

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## INTRODUCTION

“What happens to the land happens to the people.”<sup>1</sup> A foundational principle of environmental justice, this maxim is the binding thread of issue 57.2 of the *Natural Resources Journal*. As our authors analyze the tensions and transitions in environmental stewardship and natural resources development through the lenses of history, law, political economy, and geography, they reveal the transformational possibility of land ethics.

The pioneering conservationist, Aldo Leopold, would appreciate the land ethics which permeate this scholarship. Leopold began to develop this subtle, yet powerful, appreciation in New Mexico during his courtship and formative early years managing the overgrazed Carson National Forest. There he was changed by the land, and by his love of sheep-empire heiress, Estella Bergere, as our essayist Andrew Gulliford recounts. Thus unfolded Leopold’s fundamental interest in life, “the relation of people to each other, and the relation of people to the land.”<sup>2</sup>

While Leopold he may have ultimately realized the truth in civilization’s “oldest challenge” of living on the land without doing it harm, he did not always make the subtle distinction. His brash management showed early in his career: as Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce Secretary, Leopold pushed for the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD).<sup>3</sup> Formed to drain waterlogged lands, and to provide flood control and irrigation, the MRGCD would forever alter the natural hydrology of the Rio Grande. Like Leopold, institutions are often conflicted as they confront the great challenge of the Anthropocene: balancing environmental, economic, and social concerns such as food, water, and energy.

Sonya Ziaja and Surabhi Karambelkar both address this delicate balance between private rights and public goods. They dissect how value is defined and created in water management, in the cases of hydropower optimization modelling and hydropower development, respectively. Using the tools of institutional economics, they argue that California and India should incorporate pluralistic values and local realities in their climate adaptation and economic development projects. The stakes could not be higher as hydropower, a cheap and clean energy source, makes a dramatic comeback: this past winter, California exited a historic drought only to confront massive flooding (see, e.g., the Oroville Dam spillway crisis<sup>4</sup>), meanwhile India is attempting to bring 300 million people onto the power grid.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Nihigaa! Bee Liná, *Nihigaa! Bee Liná Walkers Pass Dirty Coal Plant on Navajoland*, CENSORED NEWS (July 10, 2015), <http://bsnorrell.blogspot.com/2015/07/nihigaa!-bee-lina-walkers-pass-dirty.html> [<https://perma.cc/KV3X-KCFA>].

2. Andrew Gulliford, *Aldo Leopold, Estella Bergere, Mia Casita, and Sheepherding in New Mexico and Colorado*, 57 NAT. RESOURCES J. 395, 395 (2017) (quoting ALDO LEOPOLD, A SAND COUNTY ALMANAC (1977)).

3. MIDDLE RIO GRANDE CONSERVANCY DIST., SENATE MEMORIAL 21 TASK FOR STUDYING THE ELECTORAL PROCESS OF THE MIDDLE RIO GRANDE CONSERVANCY DISTRICT: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 1–2 (no date), [http://mrgcd.com/uploads/FileLinks/d001dbb5f28d48999cbeef85e264ce76/SM21\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://mrgcd.com/uploads/FileLinks/d001dbb5f28d48999cbeef85e264ce76/SM21_Final_Report.pdf) [<https://perma.cc/MQ5S-Q5VP>].

4. Cf. Adam Nagourney & Henry Fountain, *Oroville is a Warning for California Dam, as Climate Change Adds Stress*, N.Y. TIMES (Feb. 14, 2017), <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/14/us/oroville-dam-climate-change-california.html>.

5. Cf. Annie Gowen, *India’s Huge Need for Electricity is a Huge Problem for the Planet*, WASH. POST (Nov. 6, 2015), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/indias-huge-need-for-electri](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/indias-huge-need-for-electri)

Richard Moore, in turn, urges global thinking coupled with practical local action in effectuating climate mitigation and adaptation. Analyzing food security in the context of the 2015 Paris Agreement, Moore posits policy recommendations to minimize waste of “ugly” produce. He is well-positioned to make this argument as a former truck farmer in New Mexico’s Middle Rio Grande Valley.

Mitigation and adaption measures alone, however, are insufficient to achieve climate resilience unless natural, social, and economic relationships are also nurtured and restored. The life of one remarkable *NJR* author alum has been dedicated to forging such relationships, fighting environmental racism. In honoring trailblazing environmental justice advocate and University of New Mexico School of Law Professor Emerita, Eileen Gauna, Cliff Villa’s touching tribute reminds us of the real power of scholarship in concert with public service. In synthesizing civil rights and environmental law, Professor Gauna squarely addressed the human rights implications of our modern economy.

Yuan Yang and Maxine Paul uncover other governance gaps in the balance between economic, ecosystem, and human needs, in terms of oil transport and groundwater pumping, respectively. The organizational or locational features of novel systems can facilitate evading liability under existing frameworks.<sup>6</sup> Here, the cases of incomplete adoption of the international oil spill liability framework in China and domestic well regulation in New Mexico highlight the potential consequences of failing to align environmental interests and economic incentives in jurisprudence.

As a collection, this issue speaks to a politics of reconnecting, to our neighbors and mother earth. Mobilizing social and natural capital to achieve a durable sustainability, however, triggers the twin traps of “assuming a tame solution” and “inaction from overwhelming complexity.”<sup>7</sup> The grounded scholarship contained in this issue explores the borderlands of the land–people nexus, the core of this challenge. Enjoy.

Colin McKenzie & Matthew Ramirez  
Editors in Chief

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[city-is-a-problem-for-the-planet/2015/11/06/a9e004e6-622d-11e5-8475-781cc9851652\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.55b1948ef706](https://www.njr.org/city-is-a-problem-for-the-planet/2015/11/06/a9e004e6-622d-11e5-8475-781cc9851652_story.html?utm_term=.55b1948ef706).

6. Saskia Sassen, *Spatialities and Temporality of the Global: Elements for a Theorization*, 12 *PUB. CULTURE* 215, 220–221 (2000).

7. See Ruth DeFries & Harini Nagendra, 356 *SCI.* 265, 265–270 (2017).