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Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6ws9499q>

Journal

Parks Stewardship Forum, 40(1)

Author

PSF Editorial Team, The

Publication Date

2024

DOI

10.5070/P540162918

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Origins and Innovations of Science in the US National Parks

The 2023 Leopold Lecture at the University of California, Berkeley

George Meléndez Wright and A. Starker Leopold brought science-based ecosystem management into the US national parks. Later scientists built on that work to apply new science innovations to national park resource management.

Conservation writer Jerry Emory and Alison Forrestel, PhD, chief of natural resources and science, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, discussed this progress in the A. Starker Leopold Lecture “Origins and Innovations of Science in the U.S. National Parks,” presented by the University of California, Berkeley, Institute for Parks, People, and Biodiversity, September 27, 2023. Patrick Gonzalez, Ph.D., who previously served as principal climate change scientist of the US National Park Service (USNPS) and is now executive director of the Institute, moderated.

Jerry Emory recounted the origins of scientific management of wildlife in the US national parks through the history of George Meléndez Wright (b. 1904, d. 1936), a wildlife biologist who earned his Bachelor of Science degree from UC Berkeley in 1927. George Wright and colleagues published the first scientific wildlife survey of the western US national parks and established the USNPS Wildlife Division, located on the UC Berkeley campus from 1931 to 1935. Jerry Emory recently published the biography *George Meléndez Wright: The Fight for Wildlife and Wilderness in the National Parks*.

Jerry Emory presents a historical photograph of George Meléndez Wright and Maria Lebrado (Totuya), 1929, taken by Joseph Dixon in Yosemite National Park. [PATRICK GONZALEZ](#)



Alison Forrestel illustrated innovations in science for natural resource management in US national parks today. Many new practices have emerged from a revisiting of the scientific work of Leopold.

Leopold (b. 1913, d. 1983) earned a PhD from UC Berkeley and served as a professor there from 1946 to 1978. In 1963, Dr. Leopold and colleagues published *Wildlife Management in the National Parks*, a key report that established goals for natural resource management that guided the parks for decades. In 1967, he concurrently served as chief scientist of USNPS. In 2012, the US National Park System Advisory Board redefined the goals of resource management under climate change and other new challenges in the report *Revisiting Leopold: Resource Stewardship in the National Parks*.

A. Starker Leopold was the oldest child of Aldo Leopold (b. 1887, d. 1948), the conservationist and author of *A Sand County Almanac*, whose concept of a land ethic has inspired generations of people working to conserve our Earth.

We are grateful to Estella B. Leopold, youngest child of Aldo Leopold, for her generous funding of this lecture series.

You can watch a video of the Leopold Lecture 2023 at https://parks.berkeley.edu/leopold_lecture_2023.

Alison Forrestel speaks in the Leopold Lecture, at the University of California Botanical Garden. PATRICK GONZALEZ

