

# HOLDING COMMON GROUND

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THE INDIVIDUAL AND PUBLIC LANDS  
IN THE AMERICAN WEST

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Eastern Washington University Press  
Spokane, Washington

## FULL-STOMACH WILDERNESS AND THE SUBURBAN ESTHETIC

*Harold Fromm*

These wild things, I admit, had little human value until mechanization assured us of a good breakfast. . . . When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. There is no other way for land to survive the impact of mechanized man, nor for us to reap from it the esthetic harvest it is capable, under science, of contributing to culture.

—Aldo Leopold, from the Foreword to *A Sand County Almanac*

I was inducted into the environmental movement in the early seventies as a result of an idiotic move to a seemingly idyllic farm located only fifteen miles south of the steel mills of Gary, Indiana. In those days I was not alone in being innocent of the fact that pollution traveled not just fifteen miles but fifteen hundred miles and more. But the resulting nightmare, illnesses both bodily and psychological, transformed my life and recruited me into the ranks of the ecologically committed. I wrote about and waged campaigns against air pollution and the general depredations of corporate environmental destruction. After an escape to the northwest suburbs of Chicago in North Barrington, Illinois, I continued my activism, this time not only with regard to industrial pollution but to pesticide spraying for mosquitoes, leaf-burning, water contamination by run-offs into wells and aquifers, and so forth. The village trustees hated me. But despite this ecological commitment, I never identified with terrorist types—animal-rights fanatics who destroyed laboratories and opened cages on family farms, ruining multiple lives in the process, or Earth First! types who spiked trees climbed by actual human beings like us, who are maimed for life. I found Dave Foreman's remark that he would sooner shoot a man than a grizzly rather far over the top (though Foreman, like other radicals from the sixties