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CONTACT: ROGER TURNER
(575) 522-5552

Southwest Environmental Center Celebrates 2009 Aldo Leopold Centennial in New Mexico with premiere screening of the film *Lords of Nature* in Silver City

The Southwest Environmental Center is celebrating both Aldo Leopold, the visionary New Mexico conservationist, and the role of predators such as the Mexican Wolf (Lobo) in nature, with a premiere New Mexico screening of the film, *Lords of Nature*, at the Silco Theatre in Silver City on May 15, Friday, at 8 PM.

Lords of Nature, created by Green Fire Productions and narrated by Peter Coyote, journeys to the heart of predator country: the Yellowstone plateau, the canyons of Zion, the farm country of northern Minnesota and the rugged open range of central Idaho- all places now resettled by the great predators society once banished. Here scientists discover these top carnivores are revitalizing forces of nature, a “keystone” species whose presence in sufficient numbers can dramatically reverse the slow decay of America’s wild places, especially in the West.

The film also deals with the legacy of Aldo Leopold as a naturalist, who eventually realized the importance of wolves as part of his land-ethic: a land lacking its top predators is a land subject to decay. *Lords of Nature* tracks several scientists as they document the revitalization of entire eco-systems due to the presence of top predators: “...whether it’s cougar in a mule deer system like Zion or wolves in an elk system like Yellowstone National Park,” according to Robert Beschta, professor emeritus at Oregon State University, one of the scientists interviewed in the film.

The film will be followed by a panel discussion, moderated by Kevin Bixby, Executive Director of SWEC. Panel participants will include Silver City-based author, Sharman Apt Russell, whose 1993 book, *Kill the Cowboy: A Battle of Mythology in the New West*, deals partly with the many thorny issues surrounding predator “control” versus balance and recovery.

Other panelists include Kevin Hanson, author of *Cougar: The American Lion*, and former Science Director of the Mountain Lion Foundation, based in Sacramento, California. As a wildlife biologist, he has studied birds of prey in Oregon, feral burros in Death Valley, the endangered Florida panther in the Everglades, and mountain lions in Arizona- to name a few species of interest. There will also be a representative speaker from the New Mexico Game & Fish Department.

2009 marks the 100th anniversary of Aldo Leopold's arrival in the Southwest. The theme of this yearlong celebration is the relevance of Leopold's Land Ethic and how it can be used to make policy decisions for a more sustainable environment, especially in terms of preserving wild species.

According to Kevin Bixby, "...The focus on Leopold and Lobos is appropriate and timely. Just as Leopold went from an anti-predator zealot to someone who championed the ecological importance of wolves—as famously described in his *Thinking Like A Mountain* essay—so too have public attitudes towards predators moved towards greater acceptance and appreciation."

Doors open at 7:30 PM. Admission is free. We'll be looking for Mr. Leopold, at least in spirit, who once said "... the wolf will certainly disappear from the United States unless the official wildlife agencies exempt certain definite areas of wolf range from official extirpation."

Leopold would undoubtedly be pleased to know the species he once helped to eradicate—the Mexican wolf—is now making a comeback in the Southwest, largely due to changing attitudes—that he helped to change.

The Southwest Environmental Center is a Las Cruces-based nonprofit organization that works to reverse the accelerating extinction of plants and animals worldwide by protecting and restoring native wildlife and their habitats in the Southwestern borderlands, through advocacy, education and on-the-ground restoration projects.

For further information call: (575) 522-5552.

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