Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Leopold’s Odyssey assignment**

As we discussed in previous classes, John Ehrenfeld says that people lose their way toward sustainability because they are disaffected in three critical domains of living:

* The human, arising out of our (lost) sense of what it is to be a human being
* The natural, arising out of our (lost) sense of our place in the natural world, and
* The ethical, arising out of our (lost) sense of responsibility for our actions and our relationships to others.

We lose our sense of connection to the natural world, to other people, and even to those things that give human life value, provide satisfaction, and make our lives worthwhile.

For the next 5-6 class periods we’ll check out Ehrenfeld’s ideas. We’ll start today by considering a story written by Aldo Leopold, one of America’s first ecologists, in the 1940’s. In “Odyssey” he describes the complex web of relationships that sustains life. As you’ll see, it’s not written as a scientific article or a textbook, but as an allegorical tale that could be understood by many people in Leopold’s day. The first part portrays nature in pre-industrial times; the second in a more modern situation similar to the present day.

As I (or one of you!) read the first part of the story to the class, think about and take notes on the following for discussion:

* Why does this story seem difficult to understand today? What has changed?
* What is the role of humans in each part of the story and what’s the big change?
* Leopold’s short tale has a “cast” of dozens of characters appearing sequentially, including “X.” To get Leopold’s point we need to be able to see the big patterns that create the action not just the individuals. What are patterns that Leopold mentions or that you can see for yourself?

Here are some “hooks” that might help you think of patterns.

Sun’s energy

Gravity

Ecosystems

Water and streams

Rock cycle and plate tectonics

After discussion, we’ll look at a concept map I drew of the patterns in Leopold’s story of “X.” Make sure you get a sense of how the different threads of solar energy, ecology, the water cycle, nutrient cycles, the carbon cycle, the rock cycle, and plate tectonics all weave together to make life possible!

After class write concise essays on the following questions. **Hand in this sheet and your writing next class period**.

1. Write your understanding of the big patterns that make life possible.
2. Read the second part of Leopold’s Odyssey (“Y”). What is different? How have the patterns changed? How are humans coming into the story differently than in the story of “X?” Illustrate your essay by sketching a concept map for the journey of “Y” in the second part.
3. Imagine that John Ehrenfeld has just read both parts of “Odyssey,” and he begins to excitedly jump up and down, yelling, “Yes! Yes!” Why might he react to Leopold’s story given his take on the origins of unsustainability?