

Drilling in the Wayne

I'd like to thank Christine Hughes for inviting me to participate this afternoon. I consider it an honor to be with you. Honestly though, I've struggled these past few days trying to figure out just what I'd like to say.

I suppose I could have said something about extractive industries and cycles of boom and bust in Appalachia. How coal production rose steadily in Ohio between 1950 and 1970 despite an 83% drop in the labor force. How the forests were cut and the streams polluted. I guess one person's boom is another person's bust. Why is it that people here have to sacrifice their land, and quite possibly their health, to make ends meet? Would it be any different this time around? I figured someone else might want to talk about that though.

I could have talked about how the U.S. is often touted as the Saudi Arabia of coal. And how huge deposits of natural gas in Appalachia are going to help wean us off foreign oil. At least that's what the energy companies and politicians say. I'm still trying to figure that one out. No one seems to care that the U.S. is actually the Saudi Arabia of wasted energy. But this seemed too depressing. I didn't want to go there.

I could have mentioned how absurd it is that all sorts of chemicals can get pumped into the ground to extract natural gas from deep deposits but we, as American citizens, are not allowed to know what those chemicals are, even though many of us suspect they're harmful to human health and the environment. It's a trade secret we're told. It's not hard to tell who is really running the country these days. Anyway, I'm terrible at keeping secrets so I had to scratch that one off my list too.

Here is what I do want to talk about today. Sixty years after publication of *A Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold, we are still searching for a land ethic to guide our resource management decisions – one that views a wooded acre as something more than a set of building blocks for yet another suburban subdivision or the source of someone's "cheap" energy.

I want to leave you with a few words from a piece Duke Law professor, Jedediah Purdy, wrote recently. He says . . .

“There is no equality among American landscapes: some are sacred, some

protected against harm, and some sacrificed. As a result, there is no equality among Americans *to the degree that they care about their landscapes, identify with them, and wish to imagine that their children and grandchildren might live there as they have.* If you live in a wooded suburb of Boston and treasure the preserved lands next door, if you live in the dense neighborhoods of Boulder, Colorado, and like to duck into the Rocky Mountain National Park for your summer hikes, your relation to the land is secure, a privilege enshrined in law. But if you love the hills of southern West Virginia or Eastern Kentucky [or southeastern Ohio], if they form your idea of beauty and rest, your native or chosen image of home, then your love has prepared your heart for breaking.”

I scratch my head in disbelief sometimes. Is this really the 21st century?

Geoff Buckley, Athens OH May 2012