

# Saving Tarboo Creek: One Family's Quest to Heal the Land

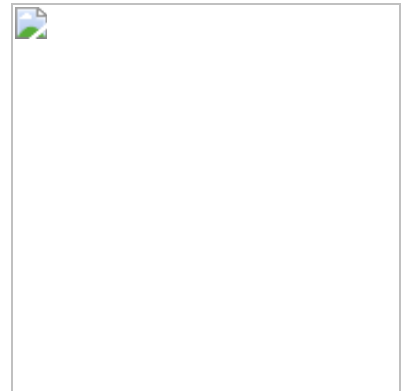
 [evergreenaudubon.org/saving-tarboo-creek-one-familys-quest-to-heal-the-land](http://evergreenaudubon.org/saving-tarboo-creek-one-familys-quest-to-heal-the-land)

JoAnn Hackos

September 2, 2018

Scott Freeman  
Timber Press, Inc.  
Portland, Oregon  
2018

Have you read Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*? If not, reading it is great preparation for reading *Saving Tarboo Creek*. Scott Freeman is an evolutionary biologist and his illustrator and wife, Susan, is Aldo Leopold's granddaughter. Scott's uncle Carl grew up, like the Leopolds, in southeast Wisconsin, where Aldo Leopold was a professor of wildlife biology at the University of Wisconsin. Farmer Carl learned from Leopold to "look up and notice things." That instruction has carried through to the younger generation of Freemans and Leopolds as they continue to work to heal the land.



Leopold's idea, Freeman explains, was simple: "Good people should treat the land around them the same way good people treat the people around them." Freeman is dedicated to improving the land around him, the land around Tarboo Creek, but he also recognizes that the challenges of the 21st century are dire. Our technologically powerful civilization threatens the future of most life forms. But, Freeman argues, where there is danger, there is also possibility. That possibility at Tarboo Creek comes with ecological restoration.

Tarboo Creek is in western Washington, flowing from north to south into Tarboo Bay and eventually into Puget Sound. Tarboo Bay is a high-quality estuary, filled with ducks, salmon, and seals. But, when we are first introduced to Tarboo Creek, we find a stream that has been turned into a ditch. No salmon move up this creek, which is blocked with poorly designed culverts. The land around it has been logged and left to fend for itself. It hasn't been successful.

In *Saving Tarboo Creek*, we learn about the Freeman/Leopold family's effort to restore the creek and the surrounding land, starting with an 18-acre parcel that they have purchased. In fact, the entire community surrounding their parcel has been working to restore the forest and wetlands and return the salmon.

The story takes us through the restoration process, especially the work to reestablish the salmon to the creek. They work with Bob Harrison, a master of stream restoration, with the help of his big Hitachi excavator. The step-by-step account is fascinating. Preparing the new stream bed includes reestablishing gravel beds to the exact correct depth for female salmon to build their nests.

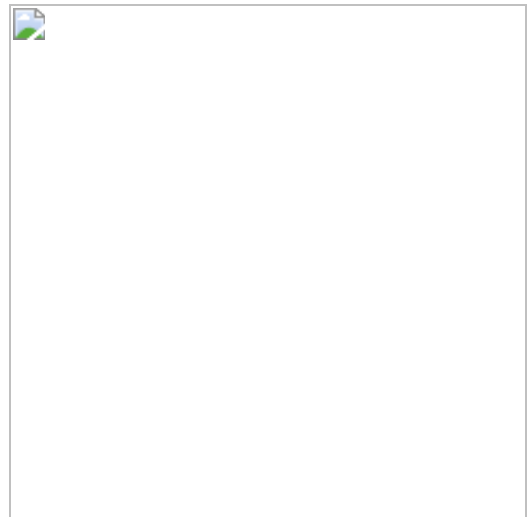
The story takes us through replanting trees on the floodplain and the old pasture. By visiting the stumps remaining from logging more than a century ago, they learn what was once there, dominated by Sitka Spruce and Bigleaf Maples. But they also realize that the climate has changed in 100 years. Should they plant for the past or for a different future? The climate-change models predict that the Pacific Northwest will be 8 percent wetter in the winter and 8 percent drier in the summer, with higher annual temperatures. Should they plant a forest like that in northern California today? As optimists, they decide to plant for today and work for a better future. “If that future doesn’t arrive, our great-grandchildren will have to replant.”

The story continues with details of the salmon run after they find a female digging a nest on Thanksgiving weekend. If you are not familiar with the life history of the salmon, you’ll enjoy the details provided here. You will also learn that in most of the world, the salmon have been hunted to extinction. “If no one owns a resource, whoever gets there first and takes the most wins ....” Hatcheries haven’t solved the problem of overfishing and habitat loss. Even the orcas are starving because of the decline of the salmon in Puget Sound.

Despite the challenges of trying to restore what has been lost, the account in *Saving Tarboo Creek* is hopeful. Trees are replanted, the salmon spawn again, carbon is sequestered in plant life. But trees are also thinned to provide the forest with more light so that some of them will grow big and tall.

At the same time, we learn of the battles with beavers who are taking the best of the trees and battles with Bald Eagles, who help themselves to the salmon. They protect the trees with chicken wire but welcome the beaver dams. They find bear tracks and get photos of bobcat and cougar. Elk visit. The plants and animals are recovering.

Freeman’s story moves us back and forth between the Pacific northwest and the Leopold Foundation in Wisconsin. The earth ethic that Aldo Leopold espoused is working in both places.



If you care about the future of the environment, the future of the earth as a fit place for humans, you will gain much from reading *Saving Tarboo Creek*. It's an inspiring antidote to all the news about the efforts to destroy the environment and advance climate change. Freeman hopes that we are in the very early stages of a positive change— “one based on free trade, democratic governance, a commitment to education, embracing differences in religious belief and cultural practice, and equal rights for women and ethnic minorities.” Let's hope he's right.

Read or listen to an interview with Scott Freeman at <https://awaytogarden.com/saving-tarboo-creek-with-scott-freeman/>