Egalitarianism is, simply put, the thought that all humans are fundamentally of equal worth. Applying this to land ethics, means that all humans deserve equal access to the resources on the land, as well as the land itself. This also means that someone needs to provide this access. This can be an individual, company, or government.



###### Glacier National Park

The best example of egalitarianism in principle are the different levels of park systems throughout the world and in the United States. These lands are supposed to be open to every single person that wants to visit them. This does not mean that any individual has the right to abuse the resource or restrict access to others. The other side is that those park systems also subscribe to ecological-based land ethics. This, however, opens up egalitarianism to more than just human interests.

#### Philosophical Origins

Like libertarianism, egalitarianism has origins in philosophy, having been co-opted into land ethics relatively recently. Like economics and utilitarianism, egalitarianism itself has existed as long as the idea of inequality.

Where libertarianism focuses on individual freedoms, egalitarianism seeks to develop and promote overall freedom for all people, as well as access to those freedoms.

The French Revolution served as a catalyst for more organized study and philosophizing of egalitarianism, with many who advocated the philosophy either coming directly from France or being inspired by the French word “égalité” as part of the motto used in the revolution. Prior to the Environmental Movement, the rising philosophies were tied to egalitarianism, such as Marxism, socialism, and communism. These connections as well as the rise of the Environmental Movement, brought land ethics into the philosophy of egalitarianism.



###### John Rawls from the Harvard Gazette

#### Post-Marx Developments

Following the rise of socialism and communism in Europe, and after the end of World War II, there was an increase in the number of individuals who were studying the concept of egalitarianism. One of the most prominent Americans to do so was John Rawls.

John Rawls is best known for his three works on the subject of egalitarianism: *A Theory of Justice; Political Liberalism; and The Laws of Peoples.* In *A Theory of Justice,* he develops the idea that the “original position” of humanity is not what Thomas Hobbes suggested, as savage and self-interested. Rather, Rawls suggested that because of what he called the “veil of ignorance,” that prevented the governing individuals from knowing the demographics of the population they were representing. Due to the nature of the individual’s ignorance about who they themselves are, as well as those they represent, proposing ideas that negatively affected any singular group would be irrational. This is possible because the individual would not know if they were part of the group being placed at a disadvantage or not.

Rawls would expand this concept and its effects on a global scale. As he continued his work, he inspired many after him, including those who would come to the conclusion that egalitarianism could apply to non-human rights as well as human rights.

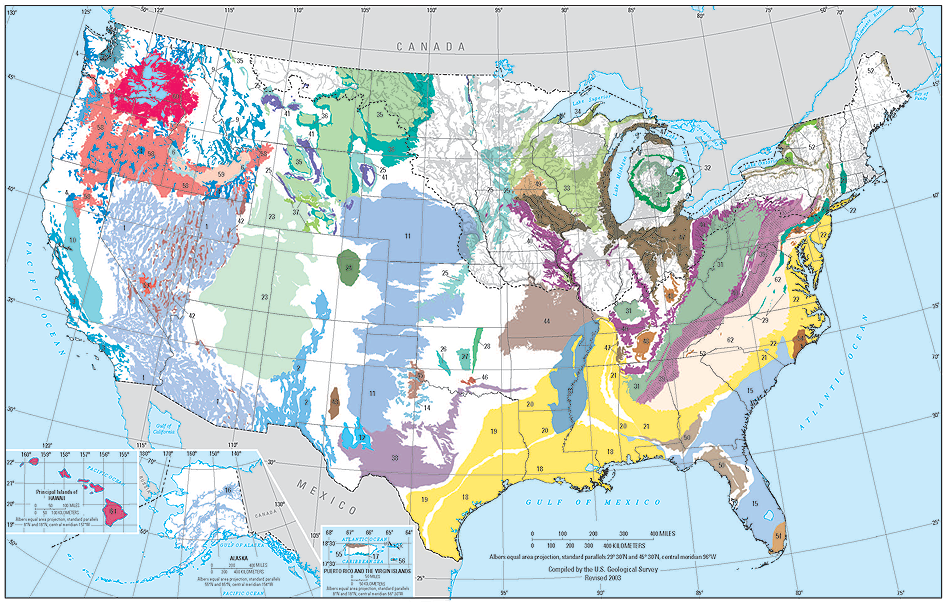


###### Confiscated Elephant Tusks on display, Nairobi National Park, Kenya 2015

Examples range from the poaching of animals like elephants for their tusks to the effects of agriculture and timber harvests in the Amazon rainforest. In other words, the concept of egalitarianism can stretch beyond just human concerns to those of the natural world.

#### Benefits

Egalitarianism is, at its base, an ideal that supports everyone having the same freedoms and access to resources. Another way of saying this is that no one is denied access to resources, or that any one group has the ability to restrict access to or damage those same resources. Since this can also extend to the natural world, the land ethic can justify the preservation of natural spaces and resources by linking those to access to those spaces and resources.



###### USGS Map of Aquifers in the United States

#### Risks

While ideally, scenarios can be justified where those in positions of power will choose not to favor or hinder certain groups, that is not currently how things commonly occur. Further, the reputation of connecting philosophies, like communism, socialism, and animal rights, have made the idea of supporting egalitarianism in the United States more difficult.