

# Vermont

by Elise [REDACTED]

Yesterday, I went for a run. It was the longest run I had ever done, fifteen miles. I had run only a few times since Cross Country season, which only happens in the fall. But those runs were shorter, three or four or six miles. But when I ran fifteen, I started to run out of things to think about. Eventually I settled on focusing on what was around me, and what I heard and saw and smelled and felt. And I was really surprised by how good it felt. I thought focusing on that kind of thing would be boring, but it was actually really nice to breathe in the fresh, clean air and hear the steady rhythm of my feet splashing in the mud on the side of the road.

It was pretty chilly outside. I bundled up with a big hoodie and jacket and scarf and pom hat and my nordic skiing pants. When I started running, I had my scarf pulled up over my nose and mouth. Not because of COVID, it was just cold. But by the time I had ran about a mile, I started to warm up, so I pulled my scarf off my face. It was still chilly but there was something amazing about it too. Even though I went outside a lot, it felt like the air was fresher, probably because I was moving pretty fast. Inside, I felt refreshed and just plain happy. It seemed like the river across the street was also happy, and the trees that lined the side of the road. That run made me start to appreciate Vermont's clean air, wildlife, trees and waters.

What I love most about the clean air is that it always has a fresh smell to it when you're outside. I like it best in the end of winter, mud season, and spring. The air has a distinct smell to it, sort of like flowers, or maybe trees and nature. Like the expression "Spring is in air."

What I love most about the wildlife is that there is a wide variety. Some days when I'm running down the road I'll see squirrels or chipmunks. Sometimes I'll get lucky and see a deer, or a black bear. Sometimes I'll see turkeys crossing the road, or hanging out in their favorite spot at the top of a sledding hill behind our house. And sometimes I'll see little garter snakes in the yard, or fish in the river and frogs on the shore.

What I love most about the rivers and lakes is the abundance of them, and how they provide many activities or sports. A common one is swimming—which is not only exercise, but it's also refreshing and fun. There's also canoeing, or water skiing, or kayaking, or sailing, and much more. For example, who doesn't love doing cannonballs off of a stand up paddle board?

What I love most about the mountains is that they all have so many different aspects. There's so many interesting boulders and trees and rocks and plants and hills and streams and caves and so much more. So much to explore—when I'm hiking, I like to create stories in my head about all those features.

What I mainly enjoy about Vermont's environment is how many fun and creative activities and ideas it provides.

What I care about most with the environment is protecting the plants and animals. There's so many beautiful forests and rivers and lakes here that we just drive past every day while some people pay thousands of dollars just to witness peak foliage.

To me, Earth Day means caring for the environment. Cleaning up plastic and beer cans and whatever other grossness litters the sides of the road. Not only acknowledging everything that the environment does for us and appreciating it.

The main thing I'm concerned about for Vermont's environment in the future is pollution and climate change. Every day when I'm in a car or if I'm biking or running, I notice litter on the sides of the road. It always makes me angry and confused why anyone would ever just throw something out the window like that that could potentially be harmful to nature.

Vermont's changing environment impacts outdoor recreation because if we continue to pollute the environment at the rate we currently are, our rivers and lakes and waters might get so polluted, it becomes unsafe to do fun water-related activities. And of course, if we litter in places where animals live, the animals might eat some of that litter, and that could harm them, or possibly kill them. Fish or animals that live in water also could be harmed or killed by polluted water. The changing environment also impacts winter sports because if climate change wins and it gets ~~really~~ warm, then we won't get as much snow and we won't be able to ski, snowboard, skate, and so on.

I think that one important thing we can do to protect Vermont's environment is to make an effort to lower our carbon footprint, and of course we shouldn't litter. And although one person can't make a huge change by merely picking up litter on Earth Day, if we all contribute, it could help protect Vermont's environment little by little.