

My name is Phoebe [REDACTED]. I go to Main Street Middle School in Montpelier, VT. I am in 6th grade and in Mr. Appel's class. Here is my essay:

The other day, me and my family went skiing by the North Branch River. It was beautiful. The snow, newfallen, seemed to quiet the whole woods. With only the soft swishing sound of skis, it felt like we were the only people in the world. There were no human-made distractions, no crowds of noisy people. There was just us, the birds, and the snow-heavy trees.

That was a beautiful experience that I know I will never forget. But it made me wonder: how many perfect days like that does the world have left? With climate change and the trash that just keeps piling up, Vermont, and the world, are changing drastically. I'm only twelve years old, and I have my entire life still to live. What kind of world will I inherit?

I've lived in Montpelier, VT my whole life, and there are so many things I love about the Green Mountain State. But the Vermont wilderness is especially close to my heart. The woods behind my house provide a sanctuary for imagination and exploration. During the first Coronavirus lockdown, nature was the only refuge I had from the loneliness and anxiety that lurked everywhere during the pandemic.

In the summertime, me and my sister love to explore the woods, climbing trees and gathering the damp, mossy rocks that sparkle with hidden flecks of mica.

During the fall, I pack my sweater pockets until they're bulging with acorns and fat pinecones.

When winter snow buries the earth and muffles the animals, my family and I go on skis together. Sometimes we'll see a deer, staring with wide eyes at us from the great drifts of white snow.

Then in March we're out in t-shirts and leggings, splashing through the mud and packing the soft snow into snowballs for my dog to catch. Before long, spring will come, yielding vast numbers of vibrantly colored flowers. In mid-April, the whole world is amplified by the euphoric sound of birdsong. Every season is worth cherishing and experiencing to the fullest.

But Vermont's beautiful outdoors are threatened by fast-growing climate change. Co2 and other greenhouse gases are heating up the atmosphere and encouraging wildfires and rising temperatures. Not to mention the trash that builds up on the sides of the roads and in rivers, endangering wildlife. Soon, there may no longer be the beautiful North Branch River that flows beside the ski and bike trails my family loves so much.

I think we can all do something about climate change, and that if everyone helps, we can change the course of it entirely. It can be small things, like biking to school or work instead of taking your car, or putting our groceries in reusable bags we bring ourselves. Even these seemingly minor things help keep greenhouse gases out of the air and trash out of the rivers

This isn't to say progress hasn't been made. It certainly has. On July first, in 2020, Vermont banned all single-use plastics, such as plastic bags and straws. A restaurant will no longer automatically give you a plastic straw in your soda, and grocery stores provide paper bags instead of the filmy plastic ones. This is a huge step forward, and it is helping to keep us and our planet safe. I hope to see more of this, today and in the future.

Vermont's enchanting ecosystems, from the sunlit marshlands to the windswept mountaintops, are precious to me, the community, and the world. We need to protect them from pollution and global warming, because if we lose them, we lose an important part of what makes Vermont so special.

I know that there are many others that care about the Vermont wilderness as much as I do, and I hope that everyone will at least try to make a difference. If we lose our natural world, there is no replacing it.