

Dear Svitek Family,

I would like to express my deepest gratitude for the generosity and kindness you have shown me. It was this kindness for someone you had never met that gave me the courage and means to spend my summer doing field research.

I spent my summer as a field research technician working on a USDA-sponsored project through the Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources at UVM. The project was focused on multifunctional land-use in agricultural areas within the Lake Champlain watershed. This summer was the first stage of the project in which data was collected on site-specific biodiversity while landowner opinions about land-use were gathered in preparation for later stages of the project. I was a lucky member of a six person team of hardworking individuals and one superb supervisor by the name of Professor Allan Strong. Waking up at 3:00am in sometimes rainy, often humid weather was not always easy, particularly in the first week. Armed with a compass, a GPS unit, aerial photos and a data sheet, I would hike out into the unknown to predetermined coordinates. The points we hiked to were chosen randomly, and were not always easy to reach. But that was half the fun! Without following easily navigated routes, I got to experience some of the most beautiful places I have ever seen in Vermont, places that I would never have even known about and perhaps even some that no one knew about.



Throughout the summer months I tested myself in dedication, stamina, patience, tenacity and skill. With the birds and trees as my guides, and the teamwork of an incredible group of people striving for the same goals, I became empowered and confident in my abilities. I learned how to identify Vermont's most common birds by sight and sound, how to navigate the back roads and backcountry of Vermont, how to lead a team, how to be part of a team, how to learn from mistakes and how to have fun no matter what the weather was, how much the mosquitoes bit or how hard the nettles stung. This was truly the most amazing summer I've ever had, and I know now that I will be most happy in life if I can find a job doing conservation work outside in nature.

Although the field season has ended in Vermont, I have found a place interning at the local lake science center where I participate in animal care and am training to give presentations to the public about natural history. This completely different second experience has made me realize that someday I would like to become an educator in some way, working to increase the public's understanding about the natural world of which we are all a part. I wouldn't have my current internship or have had my summer experience without your family's generosity and encouragement.

Thank you sincerely for everything you have given me and for everything you have given so many others. You are a truly wonderful family!

Eliese Dykstra
Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources