

**Julia Cline, AmeriCorps Member with the Lakes Region Conservation Corps**

When I came to NH LAKES, I wasn't sure what to expect. I was excited about the possibility of scuba diving to remove invasive weeds and working with kids around the state, but, other than that, I really had no idea what I was getting myself into. Boy, am I glad that I took the leap!

At NH LAKES, I dove headfirst into the thriving community surrounding lake conservation in the state, and I've made some amazing connections along the way. Everyone at NH LAKES and the other AmeriCorps members serving in the Lakes Region are super passionate about conservation, which I fully expected. What I did not expect was how passionate 'lake people' are about their lake community. Through LakeSmart visits and Watershed Warrior events, I've been to many of New Hampshire's lake communities, and I continue to be amazed by the unique culture at each lake. It is exciting to talk to locals about their passion for 'their' lakes and 'their' loons, and to be reminded that, even though conservation may sometimes be shed in a negative light, many people really do care about conservation immensely.

As a byproduct of experiencing so much of New Hampshire, I've also learned some cool things about lakes. For example, did you know that loons are most closely related to penguins? I didn't, until I started working on a conservation trivia project! I've also picked up some diverse sets of skills, from the random (driving a truck with a trailer, public speaking, and the best way to get the attention of a group of rowdy children) to the incredible (helping to launch a new statewide program with a nonprofit organization). Each day feels like a new adventure, and I'm so grateful to have had the opportunity to travel throughout the state, work with kids, educate adults, be outside doing LakeSmart evaluations, and spend time inside writing pieces like this.

**Hollyn Walters, AmeriCorps Member with the Lakes Region Conservation Corps**

Once out of undergrad, I signed up for the Lakes Region Conservation Corps AmeriCorps opportunity with NH LAKES and moved back home from Washington D.C. Having grown up in the Dover area, I was only familiar with the community and culture of life on New Hampshire's seacoast. My experience with AmeriCorps has helped me tap into a side of New Hampshire life I never knew existed—lake life. It also opened my eyes to different perspectives of older folks and children that I hadn't considered before when speaking about conservation issues. I have come to realize that everyone is connected to the land in some way—it doesn't matter what age you are. AmeriCorps helped me to understand that those generational perspectives are all as relevant as mine are as a young adult emerging into the 'real world.'

I learned how to scuba dive, drive a trailer, maintain trails, how to remove invasive species, apply wilderness first aid, and drive a boat. I also learned how to talk to all sorts of people, weigh in on all sorts of problems, and consider issues from different perspectives. Being an AmeriCorps volunteer is a challenging experience, but it is an experience that helps you grow up. It teaches you how to network, budget, put yourself out there, and find what your limits are. The program can be hard, but life is hard. I think my AmeriCorps experience has been excellent practice for the 'real world' and it's an experience I encourage people of all ages to get involved with, especially new graduates. When you give back to your community, your community will give back to you.



NH LAKES AmeriCorps Members Julia Cline (left) and Hollyn Walters (right).