

UPBEAT NEWS

AmeriCorps program crucial partner in community

COURTESY FRANKLIN COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

ST. ALBANS - This August marked the fourth year that Environmental Careers and Opportunities (ECO) AmeriCorps members have strengthened water quality efforts in Franklin County and throughout Vermont. Members, driven by passion for the environment and curiosity about career paths, bring increasingly impressive expertise from their recent college educations.

Liza Lemieux, who graduated from the University of Vermont in 2018 with a degree in Environmental Science and Agriculture, just concluded a year of AmeriCorps service with the Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District based in St. Albans.

"Liza quickly became absolutely invaluable to our work on water quality," said Jeannie Bartlett, Manager of the Franklin County Conservation District. "She took on new challenges and projects that the District would never have been able to do otherwise."

Lemieux began last fall by taking soil samples on dairy farms and assisting farmers through UVM Extension's Nutrient Management Planning class. In the winter she sought training in a technical software for modeling soil erosion and completed an intensive training on no-till farming.

Lemieux also took over project leadership for the Conservation District's three ongoing water quality monitoring programs, and she launched a fourth study in collaboration with the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). In the field season of 2019, she collected 288 water samples from the Deer Brook in Georgia, 125 water samples from agricultural tile drainage outlets, and, in partnership with a network of local volunteers, 310 water samples from the Hungerford Brook and Black Creek watersheds. With her colleague Brodie Haenke (ECO AmeriCorps 2016-18), she co-authored a report of water quality data collected in 2018 of the Hungerford Brook and Black Creek. She also conducted initial analysis of the Deer Brook data for the DEC.

Over the winter, Lemieux used her training in no-till as well as her background in soils and agronomy to advise a local farmer. He had reached out to the District for information about the impacts of growing corn on soil erosion calculations for some of his fields. "He wanted to grow corn because he was not currently producing enough feed for his cows with his all-grass operation. He was interested in doing no-till corn specifically, as he'd seen his neighbor have success

with it in the past," reflected Lemieux. "When the calculations were finished, I met with the producer to share the results and discuss options. By the end of the meeting, he had the resources he needed to make a decision, and I would just have to wait and see what that would be." About a month later, they met again. "I brought him a few more resources in case he was interested, but it turns out he had decided not to pursue the transition to no-till corn after all." When asked if she was disappointed that the farmer decided against corn after all her work, Lemieux responded, "His decision to stick with and improve a grazing operation that he and his cows love couldn't make me happier. The goal of the project was not for the farmer to implement no-till corn, but for the farmer to be able to come up with a plan that would resolve the issues he was facing while maintaining or improving the quality of his life and the land."

Lemieux was one of several AmeriCorps members serving in Franklin County. Cassi Carpio served with the Friends of Northern Lake Champlain, Catie Bartone served with the Franklin Watershed Committee, and Jenevra Wetmore served with the Missisquoi River Basin Association and the Upper Missisquoi and Trout Rivers Wild and Scenic Committee. The four collaborated with each other regularly, and with other AmeriCorps members across the state. They pulled aquatic invasive weeds from St. Albans Bay, ran outreach events, collected and analyzed hundreds of water samples, developed water quality improvement projects, and even helped with a mattress recycling event in central Vermont.

"The ECO AmeriCorps program is a crucial partner in our community-organizing and natural resources work," reflected Bartlett. "In addition to the energy and ideas of the AmeriCorps members themselves, the community of ECO AmeriCorps members across the state has improved our coordination and collaboration with other organizations."

In September, a new cohort of ECO AmeriCorps members will begin their service, including Eliza Letourneau (Duke University '19) who will serve with Haenke and Bartlett at the Conservation District.

In reflecting upon her experience, Lemieux concluded, "Thanks to ECO AmeriCorps, I had the opportunity to serve the environmental needs of my Vermont community."



ABOVE: ECO AmeriCorps member Liza Lemieux collects a water sample from the Deer Brook in Georgia.

PHOTO BY JEANNIE BARTLETT

BELOW: ECO AmeriCorps members Liza Lemieux (left), Theron Lay-Sleeper (center) and Jac Huettenmoser (right) celebrate Vermont's first ever mattress recycling event, where they diverted 128 mattresses from the landfill.

PHOTO BY ECO AMERICORPS

