

Why Protect Maine's Lakes
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My mother says that while she was pregnant with me, she used to swim in Clearwater Lake. She'd breaststroke far out, slim arms slicing through the silky smooth water. She'd swim far, far out until her arms were tired from pushing and her legs were tired of kicking and she'd turn over, onto her back, and look up at the sky. In Maine, we often take the pure, clear blue of the sky for granted; it took me years to truly appreciate and understand its beauty. In this moment, she let herself relax: She closed her eyes and inhaled the clean summer air, thick with the scent of dried pine needles that fell from their respective trees to form a golden carpet around the edges of the water. Eventually, she'd make her way back to shore and lie down on the sand, littered with nothing but oak leaves and dandelions and those golden pine needles, and place her hands on her stomach. My mother had yet to meet me, but she already knew that I would love this lake.

Eleven years later I sat on that same shore, hugging my knees to my chest, watching the Fourth of July fireworks explode into a million sparkles that reflected off of the infinite darkness of the glassy lake. Little waves licked my bare, summer-hardened feet. I didn't mind; although the breeze was harsh, and I'd refused (as per usual) to wear a jacket, the water was warmer than the air. Perhaps I was too enthralled by the bursts of color across the night sky, but I didn't notice the cans bobbing or the plastic bags floating in Clearwater Lake.

But my mother did. She sat in the car in silence on the drive home, turning a battered plastic Hannaford bag over and over in her hands. A few dried pine needles slipped from the folds of the plastic and landed on the floor of the car.

The water quality of Maine's lakes is impressive when compared to the rest of the country, however our waterbodies are still dealing with their own fair share of difficulties. Lakes are amazing little worlds, and provide a habitat for a huge group of diverse organisms. These habitats are slowly being destroyed by manmade pollution, the introduction of invasive species—an issue that Clearwater Lake itself has actually begun to deal with in recent years—and further habitat destruction through the demolition of shoreline property for real estate reasons.

I fell in love with Maine's lakes before I was even born. Even now, at age sixteen, I am astounded by their exquisiteness. I look forward to days at the lake every summer, and every summer, I'm not disappointed. If nothing is done to protect these bodies of water that Maine is so well known for, the children of the next generation will never have the chance to experience the true beauty of what our state has to offer.