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When people think of Maine, they think of cold, steely ocean, huge wild forests and rocky cliffs. What people seldom think of are the beautiful lakes that can be found all throughout our state. These lakes are so underappreciated but are so vital to our way of life.

I grew up on Mount Desert Island on the coast of Maine. As such, my experience with lakes has fallen second to my love of the ocean and the mountains of Acadia. Going to school in central Maine, however, has opened my eyes to the importance of our watersheds and the massive projects underway to protect them. To be a steward of our lakes is more than volunteering. More than cleaning trash out of the water and participating in awareness events. To be a steward of the lakes is to care about the larger picture. To know the extent of the damage we can cause if we aren't careful, and most importantly, to educate others about the subject. Every interest and every profession can help our lakes in some way. I hope to find mine soon.

My favorite lake is a tiny one, nestled into the side of a mountain in Acadia National Park. Few people even know it's there, but Sargent Mountain Pond was likely Maine's first lake, formed during the initial stages of the ice age. Bordered by thickets of pine trees on all sides, it's impossible to access without a lengthy hike (or, in my case, bike ride). It's home to dozens of species of fish and insects and has given me more than one cooling swim after the long hike. I've spent so much of my young life outside, it's difficult to pin down the exact things that make our lakes worth protecting. I do know that the reason I strive to keep them safe is the sense of pride I feel when taking out of state friends for hikes and seeing the wonder in their eyes as

they look out on Maine with awe. Our state is truly unique, and it's important we keep it that way.

In the past, I've volunteered with several organizations to protect our lakes, but I know it isn't enough. I will continue to work with courtesy boat inspection organizations to help protect our lakes, but I feel my role in this issue is a higher one. I want to become more involved in government on a state and federal level, serving as a State senator, and casting my vote to pass bills and legislature crucial to the protection of our lakes. I want to protect our environment as a whole, voting on clean energy funding bills, fishery protection bills, and helping cement the preservation of our wild state and awe-inspiring national parks.

To care about the Maine lakes is to care about Maine itself.