



Madeline Hostetler

HONORABLE MENTION Grades 10-12

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“Our ability to perceive quality in nature begins, as an art, with the pretty. It expands through successive stages of the beautiful to the values as yet uncaptured by language”. - Aldo Leopold

As a native New Mexican, I often experience the unparalleled wonders the Land of Enchantment gives to its people. When hiking various trails such as the La Luz, mountain biking the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, hunting the Valles Caldera, and swimming in the Rio Grande, I am humbled by the beauty of my native state. While fishing everywhere between Abiquiu Lake to the Pecos River, and marveling at the wondrous mysteries of Carlsbad Caverns, White Sands, and other various protected areas, I am overwhelmed by the exquisite natural beauty surrounding my birthplace. However, these beautiful places are frequently abused. This was especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unattended and neglected these local gems were subject to vandalism, littering, and many irreplaceable resources were damaged or stolen. These acts permanently scarred my most treasured nature spots and spurred me into finding ways to conserve New Mexico’s native environment.

“When enough people come together, then change will come and we can achieve almost anything. So instead of looking for hope — start creating it”. - Greta Thunberg

How do people my age create impact? It is by looking for opportunities to serve our communities and caring for the Earth’s resources closest to our hearts and homes. I have recently given back to the Bosque by planting black willow and cottonwood saplings in Belen through a volunteer group called Kids for Quail and Conservation. This project was part of a habitat improvement effort to preserve wild spaces for animals and plants to thrive. This effort also included the planting of dozens of grass seed species over an acre land plot to feed the indigenous fowl inhabiting the area. As a member of Quail Forever, a group dedicated to conserving New Mexican wildlife, I also constructed a fence to protect specialized water reserves for quail in the Magdalena Mountains. This kept out the birds’ predators while providing access to water. First, our team removed the old wooden support beams and replaced them with metal t-posts. This task was difficult because the wooden beams were numerous and evenly spaced along a 4-acre land perimeter, and each had to be pulled out by hand. We then strung barbed wire along the metal poles and used a come-along to tighten them. This process took about 8 hours, but was personally rewarding to get my hands dirty protecting quail populations in the Socorro area. I also created videos through Quail Forever to raise national awareness of the importance of conserving New Mexican quail species. In these videos, I explain different volunteering opportunities encouraging the local youth to join the cause of saving endangered species. One way I helped motivate adolescents was to demonstrate iNaturalist, an app that helps kids to identify and learn about the species of plants and animals

around them. I also engage in various fundraisers for small game conservation projects through the National Wild Turkey Federation. By following my own passions and looking for local opportunities, I can give back to the Earth while strengthening my community and influencing youth around me to take action.

“It is our collective and individual responsibility, to preserve and tend to the world in which we all live”. - Dalai Lama

Through these opportunities, I now understand that conservation and giving back to the land is an effort that everyone can be involved in. All it takes to improve the natural beauty of the earth is to make an effort. As the youth become the future of conservation, it is crucial to teach the value of loving and respecting the world we live in. As Kimmerer puts it, “Knowing that you love the earth changes you, activates you to defend and protect and celebrate. But when you feel that the earth loves you in return, that feeling transforms from a one-way street into a sacred bond”. Loving the Earth means doing what we can to return its gifts. It is not just a personal journey, but a collective effort of individual actions and kindling that fire in others.