One Day

Sam Prescott is a junior in the class of 2028 at NC State University. He is majoring in fisheries, wildlife, and conservation biology with a concentration in wildlife sciences. He is also minoring in applied ecology and religious studies. He has a passion for the outdoors and conservation that leads him to pursue academic interests in wildland fire, wildlife management, and public engagement to inform others of conservation.

Early this October I got to experience a conference unlike any I have ever heard of. The program was the Emerging Leaders Summit with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. Alongside 29 other participants who were college students, grad students, policy workers, trail workers, teachers, and many other walks of life, I truly felt a sense of belonging. This 3-day leadership conference was held at the New Jersey School of Conservation in Stokes State Forest, Sussex County, New Jersey. In the midst of peak fall colors and a cool mountain breeze, this was a much-needed getaway. Who knew you could participate in a conference in the middle of the woods?

The school was beautiful, the food immaculate, and the people incredible. What truly mattered though was the bigger picture at hand: land stewardship, conservation, and recreation management. Through workshops, lectures, and some alone time, I was able to determine my place in the world of conservation and natural resources management. I gained valuable insight into the political world of land stewardship, how trail preservation is being challenged with an ever-developing society, and I even got to hike a mile on the Appalachian Trail. The entire weekend I thought to myself, “Wow! I cannot wait to protect and fight for these resources one day.” Similar thoughts have taken over me most times I get to experience a weekend away from the busy world and truly enjoy nature.

One day I will not have to take college classes or stay up until 3:00 a.m. studying for a test. One day I will have a dream career with a dream house and a dream family. One day I will be able to protect and immerse myself in natural resources every day. One day…one day. But, what about today? What makes today not count as the “one day?” This conference made me question this idea. Is it because I am young that I can’t start something big now? Is it because I don’t have a piece of paper handed to me with my name and a golden seal on it? The real “one day” should in fact be today, tomorrow, and every day. I feel as though too many times I get caught up within the busyness of the world that I forget I am right where I need to be at this moment. The one day is right now.

Through this conference, I was able to see that right now is the time I need to focus on. Why rush the future? During this weekend, I was able to discuss with a lobbyist and policy writer for the ATC. While being present in this conversation, something clicked into place in my mind: I don't have to have it all figured out right now. Learning of this man's many career paths that led to where he is today was greatly insightful. Yes, I will stick to my dream career, but no, the path does not have to be 100% planned.

I am excited for what the future will bring. Conversing with all the people at the conference gave me insight into many more careers and stepping stones. This opportunity was unlike any other. I learned how to lead, I learned how to network, but most importantly, I learned that the "one day" should be viewed as "today and every day."




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