Northern Woodlands Reflection 2018
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My experience attending the Northern Woodlands Writers Conference gave me an inside look at what professions exist within the environmental field and what groundbreaking work is being accomplished. I attended a series of speaker sessions ranging from a lesson on wild edibles to an interactive discussion on scat.

One of my favorite sessions was a nature walk where participants practiced “forest bathing” with Susie Spikol and Marilyn Wyzga. We practiced walking quietly and slowly, moving our feet from heel to toe, as we traversed through the drizzling rain and into the woods. I was captivated by the sense of peace and connection I felt as I became more in tune to my body and nature by practicing silent meditation. I was directed to choose a tree and, as crazy as it may sound to some, hug the tree and listen to it in the most respectful of ways. By fully committing myself to the experience I believe that I was able to harness the consciousness and connection that forest bathing aims to foster. I saw myself in connection with the trees and wilderness on a new energy wavelength that I had not noticed before. This experience opened my eyes to how sacred the environment is and how as humans we spend such little time in nature that we become disconnected from it.

This realization was further exemplified by a talk that I attended given by Hans Carlson regarding his book, *Walk Towards Moosalamoo*. Carlson embarked on an epic backpacking trip through the wilderness of the Moosalamoo National Recreation Area and wrote journals detailing his experience. His writing detailed the sights and sounds of the natural world just as he experienced it, often writing in his journal in the face of a deer or wild animal. His style of writing reflected a surreal series of interactions with the natural world that showed such wonder and appreciation for his surroundings and ability to connect with nature. Carlson’s writing exposed his own realization that the natural world is wild and beautiful, and as humans we can observe this beauty once we are incredibly conscious, aware, and respectful of our place in the natural world.

Another session that struck a chord with me was the Wild Edibles session with Russ Cohen. I had to have learned fifty new species of wild edible plants, many of which can be found in Vermont, that expanded my knowledge as a naturalist and a cook. It was incredibly interesting to learn about the recipes Cohen had curated over the years and how expansive his knowledge was regarding edible plants. He inspired his audience to think about the ways in which humans have relied on agriculture and processed foods when there is such a wide breadth of plants we are not eating that grow on their own in the wilderness. This touched on many themes I have been exploring in my studies at UVM regarding our nationwide dependence on corn and how processed foods have declined the health of Americans. Cohen’s talk inspired me to continue to pursue my interest in permaculture and growing my own food and truly made me feel encouraged to study the natural world.