Northern Woodlands Reflection 2018
Tom Shafer ’22 Wildlife and Fisheries Biology major

As you pull into the Hulbert Outdoor Center which sits just off the charming Lake Morey, you feel a distinct sense of familiarity and comfort. For anyone who attended summer camp as a child walking into the Center is like walking back in time. The walls are adorned with the artwork and signatures of past campers stretching back in time. The center is a blend of comfort and happiness. As you exit the main center you are greeted with a diverse array of directions to go. One can take a short stroll down to the shore of Lake Morley and gaze upon the tranquil lake. The forest covered hills rise up inviting one to enter and unravel the hidden mysteries within. Wherever you choose to go at the Hulbert Outdoor Center will be worth your time.

Nature writing is not easy to define. That is perhaps the biggest message I took out of the 2018 Northern Woodlands Writers Conference. It’s part of what makes nature writing so beautiful. Writing about nature not only connects you to your subject but it reveals things within yourself that you may never discover otherwise. It’s the human element that makes nature writing so diverse and hard to define. Everyone has their own connection to nature, and how they choose to interact with nature writing influences their writing.

Writing about nature is also a more deeply personal experience than many other forms of writing. Experiences in nature that are so profound and beautiful in the moment can quickly slip away and little details can fade away. The challenge of nature writing is how to convey to your reader a personal and incredible moment that you experienced and do it justice with only words. Pulling a reader into nature through your words and awakening all of their senses and imagination is a grand challenge, but when done the results are beautiful.

The personal experience with nature writing can also be viewed from the perspective of the reader. The author has no way of knowing how the reader will interpret and connect with their writing. This too is part of the allure of writing about nature — sharing an idea, experience, or observation that connects with you so deeply and knowing that it can be seen so differently by others.

The sky remained overcast throughout the day with occasional misty showers giving the landscape an ethereal and mystical appearance. A sense of community and comfort was established in a group of strangers all brought together by a love of nature and the arts. It perhaps was the perfect setting and day for the conference. The Hulbert Outdoor Center is surrounded by nature on all sides and on that cool October day everyone saw things a little differently than one another, and that is what makes writing about nature so beautiful.