

In today's world, it can be hard to feel like you're truly making a difference. Sometimes, it feels like the whole world has conspired to disconnect you from anything real. *Make line go up* is the chief consideration of many well-paying careers.

Working with nature is never like that. When I volunteer with my friends to pull invasive garlic mustard from local forest preserves, I can watch the change happen right in front me. I feel the dirt on my skin, see the intricate details of every little moss, forb and flower that creeps along the ground below me. Each of them depends on my effort and care towards making their habitat a better place.

In environmental studies, your efforts feel concrete. That's good, because the problems are concrete too. I believe the degradation of our natural environment to be the most pressing issue facing us as a society today. It's far too easy to live a life without ever seeing a native amphibian or wildflower, to never walk a sidewalk or trail that isn't free of litter, and to never take a breath of fresh, clean air. I worry that many people don't know what they are missing.

My major is in Earth, Atmosphere, and Environment, with an emphasis in Geospatial Studies (GIS). Currently, I'm a senior at Northern Illinois University with an expected graduation date of December 2026. I chose this emphasis because I believe that there is a disconnect between environmentally-minded people and those working in highly technical fields. Knowledge of GIS-related technologies can greatly contribute to the management of our natural areas. Furthermore, the ability to create an excellent map or visual is crucial for communicating with the public, local governments, and industry. When these things are done well, it conveys authority, knowledge, and professionalism, as well as conveying knowledge regarding our natural areas and environments.

Working in an environmental field means constantly learning—learning new techniques, new plants, new systems of management. As someone who believes in the power of lifelong learning, I believe I am the perfect person to work with others to better understand our natural world and tackle the dire threats facing it.