

Lawns and Landscapes Through The Eyes of Caleb Melendez: Recreation and Connection

Caleb's father instilled a love of nature and the outdoors from an early age. He grew up spending time bonding with his dad while fishing, exploring new outdoors spaces, and leading hikes for his family as he grew older. These times with his dad and family have become some of his fondest memories with his family. Caleb feels a great deal of gratitude to the outdoors for providing these memories. This gratitude has turned into a passion to protect the environment, green spaces, and outside recreational activities so younger children are able to form similar memories in the outdoors as he and his family did.

As a resident of Clinton, Caleb believes that he is lucky to not only have access to parks and conservation land that is within Clinton town boundaries, but Clinton is also so close to other conservation land and parks that are easy to get to from Clinton. Places like Wachusett Mountain and Boulder Falls are some of his favorite places to hike and spend time near the water. One thing that draws him to these places is how accessible it is to navigate these places. Not only are they easy to get to from his home, but they also have clearly marked trails, trail heads, and signage. Caleb believes that this is important for people to feel comfortable navigating these spaces, even for experienced hikers like himself.

While these places have been good sources of recreation for him and his family, Caleb also believes that we all have a responsibility to conserve and protect these places. He believes that getting people to care about these things starts by learning about the history of these places and their ecosystem. He champions programming like the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Wachusett Dam Day, in which the DCR Division of Water Supply Protection opens the top of the Wachusett dam in Clinton for the public to walk across the dam. The opening of the dam is paired with public pop-ups that teach people more about conservation efforts, invasive species prevention, and watershed protection.

"I think it's important to go to these places and enjoy them. But I also like to learn about the certain things that could harm the places that I enjoy because it's important to also

protect these places. This is our outside and we need to make sure that we will have it tomorrow,” explained Caleb.

Caleb believes that this reciprocal relationship is critical in keeping the outdoors protected and resilient. He explained that it is important to get more people outdoors, but with more outdoors there is more risk to keep these places healthy if we don’t learn how to take care of them.

When asked how we could encourage young people to be more mindful of the ecosystems around them, Caleb encouraged stewards to not forget that technology is a big part of our lives now. Even as huge outdoors enthusiast, he still gets ideas and references about things to do or places to visit from places like YouTube and Instagram. He believes these are good platforms to get young people excited and informed about outdoor spaces.