

Victoria A. Peters – undergraduate student speech at WKU Green River Preserve's 10th Anniversary Celebration, September 27, 2014.

Ever since I can remember I have always wanted to be a scientist. I have always had an intense curiosity as to how and why things happen as they do. In addition to this thirst for knowledge I have always had a deep respect for the environment. So when I was given the chance to do research with Dr. Albert Meier as an incoming freshman I was exuberant. As excited as I was, I was also extremely nervous. Nervous that I wouldn't be able to make it as a scientist or that like most freshmen I would realize that this was not what I wanted to do with my life. However, all of that was put to rest the first time I came to the Preserve. With the combination of the natural beauty of the karst environment and the obvious dedication of the staff and other researchers I knew that there was nothing more I wanted to do in life than help conserve places such as these. With this quote by Steward Udall "Each generation has its own rendezvous with the land, for despite our fee titles and our claims of ownership, we are all brief tenants on this planet," we are reminded that our time here on Earth is brief and during that time we share the land with many different organisms who rely on Earth resources to survive. Just like these organisms, the students of Western Kentucky University also rely on these resources for our research. Without the conservation of this land many of us would have missed out on many experiences that have shaped our minds and future endeavors as researchers. As said by the famous scientist Johannes Kepler, "The diversity of the phenomena of Nature is so great, and the treasures hidden in the heavens so rich, precisely in order that the human mind shall never be lacking in fresh nourishment." And here at the Preserve students will never be lacking for nourishments for our minds or our research. The Preserve is not just a piece of land but a symbol that represents growth and the pursuit of knowledge. More importantly to the students that work here it represents our passions, aspirations, and the potential of our generation. In the theme of Western Kentucky University, the spirit of this Preserve has led many of us to become the masters of our futures. By being given the opportunity to learn from our surroundings we have also been given the opportunity to experience the world hands on and to make connections to what we are studying on a deeper level of understanding. Through this we have not only been handed the tools to become better scientists but also the tools of wonder and inspiration. When I am in the Preserve and I hear the sounds of the birds and the insects on a summer day I heard a symphony more beautifully composed than any created by man and when I look around as see the rolling hills and the Green River rushing past me I see a landscape more perfect than any painted masterpiece. I am awed and humbled by the beauty that is surrounding us and in moments like these I fully appreciate that opportunity that I have been given to come and conduct my research here. Nothing inspires me more as a scientist and as a human being than when I am in the field and I feel the soil under my feet and the bark of the trees under my hands and know that what I am doing could help others. Through the power of conservation and the continuation of student research here at the Preserve there is no limit to what we can do in the scientific, national, global communities with our findings. I would like to thank everyone here who has allowed the students of WKU to have these experience for the past ten years and hope the next ten years will be just as successful. I would like to end on this quote by Anais Nin, "The possession of knowledge does not kill the sense of wonder and mystery. There is always more mystery." Thank you.