

When most people think of conservation their minds jump to things such as recycling, gardening, and conserving water. These are all great ways to conserve Earth's resources, but there is a subtle type of conservation that comes to mind when I think of conservation. I associate it with ranch and land management.

I've lived on a family ranch in the Texas panhandle my whole life. My dad has been ranching on this land for almost thirty years, and due to his ranch management practices, both his operation and wildlife habitats have benefited. While most ranchers practice continual grazing and leave cattle in a pasture for a month or even a whole year, my dad practices rotational grazing, so he only has cattle in a pasture for two to four days. This is just enough time for the cattle to eat the tops off of the various grasses within the pasture to stimulate plant growth. After a couple of days, the cattle are moved to a new pasture with fresh grass. Ranchers who leave their cattle in the same pasture for a month or year leave a devastating scar on the land and natural habitats. The longer the cattle stay in one place, the more they trample and eat the grass. Overgrazing is not good for the land, and it can even negatively affect other wildlife. My dad has been able to take better care of the land and wildlife through his ranch management practices. By improving wildlife habitats, animals including but not limited to the lesser prairie chickens, white-tailed and mule deer, bobwhite and scaled quail, Rio Grande turkeys, and black-tailed prairie dogs are able to benefit. He even won the Lone Star Land Steward conservation and management award in 2008 for his ranch managing practices. He says he wants to leave this ranch in a better condition than when he first got it. I am proud of my dad for using what I believe to be a superior ranch management practice. I think it's amazing that my dad has been

able to improve the quality of the Earth, and provide a safe environment for the many wildlife critters that are native to this area.

Even though my dad is my biggest inspiration, my mother has also inspired me. Every spring, about mid-April or May, we till up our garden and plant several rows of vegetables and fruits. Every day we go out and care for the garden. We water it, pull weeds, and pick our produce. Each year, we are blessed enough to have extra produce to give away to friends and family. There's something so rewarding about eating food that you planted and helped to grow. In addition to our vegetable garden we also plant flowers every spring. My mother, an avid bird watcher, loves the birds that the bright buds attract. We enjoy the birds not only in the spring and summer, but year-round by putting out suet and seeds in the winter for them.

It gives me a sense of pride that my parents have taught me how to take care of the Earth. They are my inspiration for doing my part to take care of the Earth as best as I can. Inspired by their example, for the last two springs as a volunteer service project, I have planted flowers at our local library with my sister. I had to clean the dead plants out the flower beds and add new soil. It is not the easiest work, but to me it's some of the most fun work. By doing this I was not only tending to the Earth, but I was beautifying our community. I received comments from various adults within the community as to how beautiful our library looked. I am excited to continue this project again this year and hopefully in the years to come.

With my biochemistry degree I will be able to go into the agriculture field. I think it would be fascinating and rewarding to figure our natural ways to improve crop and livestock production. In college I will also be in a Leadership Living Learning Community. Since I am in this living community I will be taking a one hour leadership class. With the combination of my

degree and leadership skills that I will acquire, I hope to be involved in many more community service projects that help the environment. I also hope to continue with similar projects not only throughout college, but for the rest of my life. I understand that I am just here on Earth for a short while and that I need to do my part to take care of the planet and the valuable resources that it has to offer so that I can help ensure that future generations will inherit a beautiful and thriving planet.