During this past semester, I spent time volunteering for “Clean Virginia Waterways.” Which is a local nonprofit organization that focuses on the preservation of all of Virginia’s precious water supply. Whether that be a stream, beach, bay, or even groundwater, CVW strives to maintain their sanitation to create a more environmentally friendly Virginia. The special part about CVW is their affiliation with Longwood University. Since 1999 their office has been located on the outskirts of campus, where the end of Brock Commons meets with Pine St. I chose to work with CVW due to not only their close affiliation with Longwood but also the admiration I possessed for their agenda. Although it is not spoken about enough, environmental preservation is crucial to the health of the planet. Even an hour of picking up litter can make a difference. I believe that society overlooks litter as a minor inconvenience, not as the major problem that it truly is.

 My time volunteering at CVW was spent picking up litter in local parking lots around Farmville. Before volunteering, I had never realized how much trash cluttered places that I visit every day. The most common piece of litter to be found were cigarette butts. Considering I have never smoked before, I never thought about it being the most common form of litter. In the Macado’s parking lot alone there were easily over a hundred cigarette butts. This struck a chord with me because not only is smoking detrimental to a person’s health, but also the environment’s health. There should not have been remains of cigarettes in the stream behind Macado’s, but unfortunately, there was plenty. In addition to cleaning up the stream and parking lots, I also spent time working in the Clean Virginia Waterways house itself. There, I worked to create “trash nets”. The proper terminology for them to me is unknown, but the purpose of them is to collect the litter that is in the waterways. By the end of my service, I cut and measured about 180 “trash nets.” Although the work was tedious, I was able to clean many waterways in Virginia without even having to clean them myself. The thought of those nets being used for future preservation projects makes me feel content to know that I made an impact on the Farmville community while only being here for a total of three months.

This experience with volunteering for CVW has enlightened me to a different type of community service than what I was used to. In high school, I was a part of various service-based organizations, such as The National Beta Club and The National Honor Society. However, my service never branched outside of my hometown. With CVW I was able to make a difference, not only in Farmville but also the entire state of Virginia. Working with a nationally recognized organization provided me with a much different sense of accomplishment than my volunteer time in local Elementary Schools in my hometown. Not that my service time during high school wasn’t essential or valuable towards my community, but I could genuinely feel myself growing as a citizen leader during my time volunteering for CVW.

Service is vital to the community due to the lasting effects that it provides. From my experience, everyone goes through hardships, and communities are not excluded from this. Whether the struggle is as massive as environmental preservation, or as small as needing help for a local “Fall Festival,” volunteering makes an impact. Without volunteers adhering to the needs of the community, communities begin to fall apart. Thus, in a sense, there is no concept of a community without community service. Considering that Longwood in itself is a community, it also thrives on the service of its citizen leaders. The Cormier Honors College does a great job of promoting community amongst the rest of campus. Even students who are not in honors become intrigued in the programs that are advertised by honors, and therefore allowing for Longwood to become an even tighter knit community.

Finally, community service is important to me because helping others provides me with the highest sense of accomplishment. I know that when others have helped me, I feel doused in appreciation for them. Ultimately, I want to spread that feeling of gratitude to all of the communities that I am associated with; whether that be in my hometown of Chesterfield and the Richmond area, or my new home of Farmville, or any other places I end up on my life journey. As someone who has struggled emotionally and financially, I find that service is even more rewarding due to my hardships. Having been helped before by community has opened my eyes to the significance of community service. It affects more lives than people realize, and it should be done for more reasons rather than “just for credit.” Service should come from the heart and should be done for the sole purpose of helping others. Throughout the rest of my career at Longwood, I look forward to participating in multiple other service projects. However, it feels overwhelmingly satisfying to have already made a difference to the communities of Farmville and Longwood by volunteering at Clean Virginia Waterways. This opportunity may not have been so easily accessible to me if I were not a member of the honors community, and for that, I am immensely grateful.