

A New Generation Superhero: Sonja Michaluk Defends Aquatic Habitats

The Woman Reaching Beyond

Based in Princeton, New Jersey, Sonja Michaluk finds herself basking in the wonder of aquatic environments where her passion resides. At a young age, she advocated to protect the wetlands of her city from a national pipeline, demonstrating her dedication to the biodiversity in the bodies of water that surround her. She then founded the Conservation Communities Initiative in 2017, aiming to promote the conservation of aquatic habitats. Even now as a college student, she runs her own genetics lab and is also working to establish a DNA barcoding tool to assist citizen science research to better identify aquatic organisms without immediate professional help.



Inspiration: A Change in Hope

As land-dwelling inhabitants, we are often hesitant to take a stand and protect the water that

provides a myriad of ecosystem services for us. Often, addressing environmental issues such as these seems overwhelming, but Sonja shows just how one person can tackle an issue like this, using sheer will and dedication to these habitats. A hero to the many organisms of this habitat, she has cultivated a sense of hope in us that serves as a light in the dark when it comes to kickstarting an environmental dream. She has shown us that it is possible to make a difference by starting with small progress and using determination to work up the chain, even when things may seem lost.

Everlasting Takeaways

In a world so large, many environmental issues are brushed under the rug. However, Sonja demonstrates just how much of an impact one person can have in climate justice. We are all able to make a stand if we harness just the right amount of passion in our hearts toward Mother Nature. The time to act is now, and Sonja, ever the superhero she is, has not shied away from this fact and has chosen to lead by example. The Earth, in turn, smiles from her actions.

References

1. <http://www.broweryouthawards.org/winner/sonja-michaluk/>
2. <https://why.org/articles/teenager-protecting-new-jerseys-watershed/>
3. https://www.cmu.edu/bio/news/2022/0629_michaluk-profile.html

Dear Sonja,

What you have done for the aquatic environments has left us on the edge of our seats, craving more. You stand as a real life superhero in climate justice—someone who protects and defends a much needed ecosystem that has been dying to put its voice out to the world. Nothing more has struck us as beautiful as this. Your actions have led us to believe that these habitats are in good hands with you serving as an inspiration to get others moving in times of need, us included. Here are a few things that we're left pondering and that we hope you'll be able to answer to further our pursuit in forming our own initiative:

- 1) What keeps your motivation strong when people or policies push your ideas/actions back?
- 2) Who are some of the people that inspired you at such a young age to pursue this work?
- 3) What is your best advice when it comes to encouraging people of all different backgrounds and experiences to join this movement, especially when it comes to citizen science data collection?

Thank you for your time and effort on your project and your unyielding dedication to Mother Earth. And truly, thank you, for being a superhero that this Earth needed.

Sincerely,

Belmont ECO Club