



## The University of Vermont

Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources

May 2, 2019

Peter Hawks  
Flyin Ryan Hawks Foundation  
40 College St, Suite 100  
Burlington VT 05401

Dear Mr. Hawks,

Maya Dizack's planned scientific exploration on the Mississippi River in summer 2019 will be a meaningful experience. At age 20, she will be one of the youngest to kayak the length of the Mississippi. Yet, rather than simply paddle the river as an adventure, Maya will monitor water quality and for presence of microplastics using two methods for comparison along the way. She will engage others and share her findings with communities by which she passes by enlisting local citizen scientists to assist with the monitoring effort. Her exploration will help fill critical knowledge gaps identified by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and partner organizations, as she will build upon two existing water quality data sets. Plus, data she collects about microplastics will help inform the efficacy of the two methods, providing guidance to other researchers who strive to quantify pollution of surface waters by these tiny pieces of plastic in the environment.

I have been fortunate to know Maya professionally since 2006 when she began her participation in a statewide volunteer stream monitoring program in Wisconsin that I led. Until her high school graduation in 2016, with the support of her parents, Maya was a stalwart WAV volunteer. She took on monitoring multiple stream sites and participated in numerous research and outreach endeavors supplemental to the main stream monitoring program. This included applying for and being awarded a grant to install floating treatment wetlands to help remove phosphorus from a pond that she and other students confirmed was as a source of nutrients to Lake Michigan. As I joined the faculty at the University of Vermont (UVM) just before Maya arrived here as an undergraduate student, it has been a privilege to see her excel in the college environment. Maya is an excellent student who is driven by curiosity. She is wonderfully eager to understand the world and help improve it for future generations. As a Watershed Educator for Lake Champlain Sea Grant Extension, she is effective in sharing her knowledge with others.

I believe that awarding Maya with a Flyin Ryan Adventure Scholarship would be beneficial to both your foundation and to Maya. The scholarship would provide her enhanced opportunity to consider her scientific questions, and the Flyin Ryan Foundation would be represented by a well-rounded, scientifically-inquisitive young woman, who is enjoying her life's adventure, and making a positive mark wherever she goes. I wish you well in your selections process.

Sincerely,

Kristine Stepenuck  
Extension Assistant Professor