

## *You Do WHAT?*

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### **Meet Meredith Simard**

*Transient Non-Community Program Coordinator  
Department of Environmental Conservation*

#### *What is your job at the Agency?*

I am the Transient Non-Community (TNC) Program Coordinator with the Drinking Water and Groundwater Protection Division. That's a really technical way of saying that I work with many of Vermont's small businesses to ensure that they are providing safe drinking water to the public.

Transient Non-Community water systems include the restaurants, hotels, campgrounds, rest areas, golf courses, and fitness centers throughout Vermont that you visit every day. They may be privately or publicly owned. To get technical, these water suppliers serve water from their own water source to at least 25 people a day for a minimum of 60 days of the year. Just in the way that a restaurant is required to handle and serve food so that people don't get sick, TNC water system owners must do the same.

There are over 700 TNC water systems throughout Vermont. From inspecting water systems to providing training to water system owners, my job as the [TNC Program Coordinator](#) includes a little bit of everything.



#### *What inspires you about where you work and how you do it?*

I love working with the TNC Program because it's all about protecting the public health of Vermonters. Here in Vermont, most people have access to plenty of clean and safe drinking water. For that reason, it's really easy to take clean drinking water for granted. All the behind the scenes work we do in the public drinking water program – conducting inspections, helping systems find and fix issues, and monitoring sample results – allows Vermonters to continue to feel confident in their drinking water.

#### *What childhood experience guided you towards your current career?*

I spent most of my childhood holed up in my room with a pile historical fiction books in preparation for becoming a historian. Our neighbor joked that he never saw me outside. But I grew up in West Swanton on Lake Champlain with parents who were always outside. They were active, too, working in the garden, canoeing, swimming, fishing, or walking in the woods. Their work ethic and connection to nature certainly rubbed off on me, but it took a while before I recognized something outdoors that I cared about myself.

When I was in high school, my community entered into a complicated debate about the removal of the causeway at the mouth of the Missisquoi Bay. The bridge was due for replacement and full removal of the causeway was proposed as a way to improve water circulation between Missisquoi Bay and the rest of the lake. The removal was proposed as a potential way to reduce phosphorus concentrations and the occurrence of blue-green algae blooms in the bay. The causeway, however, is habitat for spiny softshell turtles, which are on Vermont's threatened species list. This issue was right in my backyard and the debate got me thinking about the connection between state and federal policies and environmental issues. From then on, I wanted to do work that would improve water quality.

*So you learned then that you cared about water. How did you end up in the TNC program?*

I started off focusing on surface water rather than drinking water. I took all sorts of water resources classes during my undergrad at UVM, including courses on pollutants in surface water, limnology, wetlands, and ecosystem restoration. During and immediately after my undergrad, I worked with the Vermont EPSCoR (Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research) Streams Project assisting undergraduate and high school students in conducting water quality research on streams and rivers. I worked as a water resources scientist at a private environmental consulting firm, performing the glamorous job of measuring water levels in wells at all hours of the day and night while pumping water from a test well. I quickly realized that I didn't like independent nighttime field work, but I was still really interested in the world of drinking water.

I started with the TNC Program in 2013 and it's been a great fit, specifically because it links my passion for the environment with public health. As recent events show, the ability to provide safe drinking water is a direct reflection of our environmental stewardship.

*Do you have a career highlight you can share?*

The EPSCoR program gave me experience in all aspects of science, from field work, laboratory analysis, and data management to mentoring skills, outreach tactics, and public speaking. There is no doubt that these experiences gave me the foundation I needed to end up where I am. Because I feel that I owe so much to the EPSCoR Program, my biggest professional highlight has been being invited back each summer to speak on a career panel and share my experiences with the new group of high school students.

*What's the best piece of advice you've received in your job?*

To be a successful scientist, you have to be an effective communicator. Public drinking water systems are subject to a lot of technical rules and regulations. Even for those of us who work in these regulations daily, they are not easy to understand. The people who own and operate the majority of the TNC water systems in the state are business owners and volunteers, not professional water system operators. It's our job as state representatives to make sure we provide the resources, education, and tools in a way that is easy for everyone to understand so that they can focus on running their business.

*So what advice would you give someone wanting to enter your field of work?*

No matter what part of the drinking water field you're interested in, my best advice is to get as much hands on experience as you can with a professional water system operator. Contact your local municipal water system to see if they have any entry level jobs available or if they are interested in taking you on

as a volunteer. On-the-job training is invaluable in this field and will help you to understand source protection, water chemistry, mechanics, lab work, and troubleshooting.

*Of course, you're more than your job title! Tell us what you "geek out" on when you're not protecting drinking water.*

I love being a coach for Girls on the Run! Girls on the Run is a three-month long, after school program for 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade girls that incorporates physical activity into fun lessons that encourage positive emotional, social, mental, and physical development. At the end of the session, all the girls participate in a Girls on the Run 5K event with other teams from throughout northern Vermont. I originally became involved with Girls on the Run because I love running, but the program is about way more than just running. It's about inspiring girls to be joyful, healthy, and confident. The very best part last year was participating in the 5K race with two girls who didn't think they liked running and seeing their amazement at the crowd who was there to cheer them on.

*It seems like everyone at ANR is enthusiastic about the environment. What's your favorite Vermont season and why?*

I think Vermont is at its best in the fall when the humidity drops and temperatures cool. The arrival of fall means that I don't have to get up at 5:00 in the morning to finish my weekend long run before it gets too hot out. Then there's still plenty of time to pick up some cider doughnuts and cheer on my fiancé's high school soccer team.