I had never given much thought to the realities of wildlife conservation until I was sitting on the west side of San Juan Island, watching a team of NOAA biologists attempt to hand-feed an orca calf a piece of Chinook salmon. Her name was Scarlet, or J50, as her numerical, scientific name designated. Scarlet was not even four years old and was already suffering from a medical condition known as "peanut head," where the outline of an orca's skull is visible through their blubber. This condition, typically indicative of malnutrition, was not uncommon for the Southern Resident killer whale population. However, Scarlet herself was unique – in a dying population that skews heavily male, any young female is critically important. An "any method necessary" approach was adopted to prevent her death, something that was heavily criticized at the time.

By the time I moved to Alaska for university, I had already been working with cetaceans for several years, both in whale watching and as a volunteer with the Center for Whale Research on San Juan Island. My intent in university had been straightforward: study marine biology. Instead, I became captivated by the relationships that humans form with whales and other endangered species, an interest that was no doubt spurred by the wealth of emotionally conflicting experiences I had while working with killer whales like Scarlet. I quickly changed my major to cultural geography, a program which was unfortunately terminated during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, I still maintained these interests: my undergraduate degree is in Environmental Humanities, a self-designed major that I created in collaboration with Dr. Kevin Maier. This degree program utilizes geography, biology, and humanities courses to interrogate the relationship that conservation biology has with politics and society. Due to the unique cross-campus engagement that the University of Alaska system fosters, I was able to take numerous

courses through other Alaskan campuses as part of my degree program, something that only increased my fondness for interdisciplinary approaches to environmental questions.

In addition to my academic studies, I work as a research assistant to Dr. Heidi Pearson. In her marine mammalogy lab, we are utilizing blubber samples taken via crossbow to determine the long-term cortisol levels of humpback whales in relation to the presence of whale watching vessels. Under Dr. Pearson's guidance, I have also led multiple efforts to increase the understanding of local killer whale populations. I recently processed a decade's worth of killer whale data and identified individuals via saddlepatch and scar placement. As a result, I produced the first killer whale identification guide in Juneau. As part of my capstone biological research course, I am studying the geospatial ecology of resident and transient orca through GIS and SOCPROG programming. I have recently received a research grant to install a long-term hydrophone in Lynn Canal, Alaska to collect acoustic data to determine the seasonality and distribution of various killer whale ecotypes in Juneau. This research is produced with the goal of directing conservation efforts and policy measures to reduce harm and improve animal welfare. During this semester, I am writing my undergraduate thesis, where I analyze the conservation and management response to three unique situations involving the killer whale calves Luna, Springer, and Scarlet.

I am interested in pursuing a master's degree in Environmental Studies in order to continue my research on the cultural aspects of killer whale conservation. I am drawn to the interdisciplinary nature of the field, which allows for a nuanced, comprehensive approach to environmental questions. I have been interested in The Evergreen State College's program in environmental studies for several years now. The university was one of my top choices for my undergraduate studies for its unique approach to learning and research. Coursework such as

"conceptualizing our regional environment," "conserving and restoring environmental diversity," and "marine ecology" are of interest to me, as they interrogate the relationship between space, biology, and conservation, while maintaining an emphasis on Pacific Northwest ecosystems. This is important to me, as my research subjects, the Southern Resident killer whales, are impacted by local conservation and policy measures. During my master's degree in the Environmental Studies program, I would like to study the confluence of conservation policy, biological research, and wildlife tourism and its impacts on the Southern Resident Killer Whales. I am interested in studying the ways in which these scientifically-mediated understandings of killer whale space create and shape ecotourism messaging throughout the Salish Sea.

I am highly drawn to The Evergreen State College's Environmental Studies graduate program for several reasons. Most notably, the ability to continue my research and work with faculty who are interested in similar interdisciplinary questions. The program's focus on human-environment interactions is apparent when viewing past MES theses and potential coursework. In a more personal sense, I am absolutely in love with western Washington and have long considered it to be my home, even during my time in Southeast Alaska. Prior to university, I lived on San Juan Island and in Bellingham. My experiences in the region inform much of my work today, and it is a region that I consider 'home' in the most tender way. My wife and I have longed looked at Washington as a place to plant roots, something that I eagerly look forward to as I struggled with persistent homelessness throughout my undergraduate degree.

After completing Evergreen's master's degree in Environmental Studies, I hope to continue on to a PhD program. I aim to become a professor at a university where I can teach students in addition to researching. I have a long history of working in the field of environmental education and teaching, and it remains a passion even through my research work. Earning a

master's degree from The Evergreen State College's Environmental Studies program is the ideal preparation for my future goals, and I am thoroughly excited by the prospect of joining the program.