

Statement of Purpose

There is a place where "dinosaurs roam." This place is cradled in a valley where the skies are expansive, the soils are fertile, the cows graze large fields, and where culture is loud and proud. This place is small in size but big on community. Residents gather and bring a dinosaur to life every summer by plastering clay on a metal frame that the city welds. These dinosaurs are then strategically placed within city limits. The residents of this town speak Spanish and English, are low to middle-income, and have been living in the area for generations. In the spring, the town fills with the aroma of nutrient-dense manure and, occasionally, the tap water will smell like sulfur. This place is real and is also the place I call home. It is the small town of Granger, located in Eastern Washington.

Living in an area such as this has taught me a lot. The slower-paced environment helped me appreciate the simple things and cultivate a sense of community. I lived alongside and learned from locals who ranged from farmers, farm workers, tribal members, small business owners, and immigrants. The exposure opened my eyes and granted me compassion toward the different perspectives and experiences that certain community members can have. These experiences came to light in high school when I attended the Groundwater Advisory Committee meetings. A board member asked me to help film the meetings which would be broadcasted locally. The board consisted of stakeholders from government officials, environmental groups, scientists, farmers, and the public. The contamination of the groundwater was the main topic discussed. As I filmed, I was shocked to hear that several wells in my area (a low-income BIPOC population) had been tested and demonstrated concerning water quality levels, possibly due to all the nearby dairies. All parties involved had their say, and the conversations got heated often. Eventually, I graduated and could not continue filming the meetings, but this experience impacted me to be more involved in environmental topics and discussions. Especially topics that involve how disproportionately communities of color are affected by pollution or lack of quality green spaces. These environmental concerns laid the foundation for whom I was becoming as I enrolled at Washington State University.

Initially, my goal was to become the next Latina veterinarian and help communities like mine get quality and affordable pet care. My love for animals remained, but my career path took a turn come sophomore year of college. After further contemplation, I realized the kind of impact I wanted to make, the people and living beings I was trying to help, and the life I wanted to live did not precisely align with my desire to become a veterinarian. I needed a position where the impact would extend to a larger scale. It was then that I changed my major to Wildlife Ecology and Conservation. That was one of the best decisions I could have

made for myself. I thoroughly enjoyed the hands-on and outdoor classes, field trips, group projects, discussion of current environmental issues, lab work, and guest lectures that came with being a School of the Environment major.

As I was working on my degree, I noticed the need for more diversity in the student body and staff within the School of Environment. Even from a predominately white institution, the concentration of students of color in the program compared to other majors in the school was relatively low. This trend did not stop at WSU. However, this only heightened my desire to pursue the environmental field. As a multicultural student mentor at the time, I found it meaningful to share my experience in the School of Environment with other multicultural students. Growing up, no other peers mentioned pursuing an environmental career. Although a common trend in rural communities and communities of color, we need more of the BIPOC community to consider and possibly pursue a career in the environmental field.

After earning my bachelor's degree, I interned with Glacier Peak Institute and practiced forestry-related stewardship while also providing mentorship to local young adults from the rural community of Darrington. Following that, I served with the Washington Conservation Corps. In my first year, I served on a restoration crew sponsored by the City of Redmond. I am currently in my second year with the program and serving on the Forage Fish Crew in Olympia, sponsored by the Department of Fish and Wildlife. I have enjoyed learning new skills and applying previously learned knowledge in all my post-graduation positions. I have been growing as a young professional with each opportunity I get. It was the right decision for me to jump into the field after graduation. After acquiring some experience and a better direction for furthering my education, I am ready to pursue a graduate degree. In my time in these positions, I learned that I have a particular interest in freshwater ecosystems, fish/wildlife biology, and environmental justice. Evergreen College's ability to incorporate all my interests in one marketable degree intrigues me the most. The ability to research a topic of my choice also allows me to elevate the experiences of affected communities and vulnerable ecosystems. I would love to formulate a thesis with Dr. Erin Martin on water quality and communities of color. The Masters in Environmental Studies program has the curriculum and resources that would bring me one step closer to becoming an environmental leader and advocate for diversity in the environmental field. If given the opportunity, I would be honored to be a Geoduck.