

I am from Hanford, California, a town of about 60,000 located in the San Joaquin Valley. Hanford is an agricultural town, and much of the ecosystem of the area has been destroyed for agricultural use, and the area has always dealt with water pollution due to agricultural chemicals. When I was a child, my mom would tell me about the great Tule Lake that was drained for agriculture and the Tule Elk that used to live here. She would also read me stories from the Yukot Indians who are indigenous to the area. In the stories, each animal, coyote, elk, mountain lion, eagle, and bear, had a different personality and a different role in the creation of the universe. As I grew up in a town with more and more urban development, industrial agriculture, and very little natural land left, I often wondered what the ecosystem looked like back in the days of the Yukot and Tule Elk. The endangered San Joaquin Kit Fox, who's species is at risk due to habitat loss, screamed at me when my shooting baskets prevented it from eating my cat food.

In middle school, I began to watch a show on Animal Planet called "Big Cat Diary" which followed the lives of individual Lions, Leopards, and Cheetahs in the Masai Mara in Kenya. I developed a love for African wildlife, big cats especially. This love led me to go on a National Geographic Student Expedition to Namibia in 2015, where I was able to see a lot of the megafauna I watched on TV up close. In Namibia, I was also experiencing a country that had an economy based largely on eco-tourism and met people who had successful careers as conservationists. I learned about anti-poaching strategies from Rhino and Elephant conservationists, and visited the Cheetah Conservation Fund, where I not only met the Executive Director and the Cheetah Conservation Geneticist, but learned about their livestock-dog breeding program that allows herders to protect their sheep and goats from cheetah without hurting cheetah. These experiences continue to be a major inspiration to me as I map out my future career as an endangered animal conservationist. With IUCN listing the Cheetah and African Elephant as "Vulnerable" and the Black Rhinoceros as "Critically Endangered", ensuring the survival of these species is something I will always hold close to my heart, and I believe Evergreen State will give me the knowledge, experience, and flexibility to pursue this goal.

Upon returning to Hanford from Namibia, I wanted to begin making a difference in environmental conservation and began volunteering with a local land trust called Sequoia Riverlands Trust on a regular basis. In my senior year, I constructed six bat boxes that house up to 250 bats each and installed them in trees at their Blue Oak Preserve in Springville, California. After I graduated high school in 2017, I did an 8-week long summer internship with SRT where I received intensive experience with fieldwork including GIS mapping, invasive species removal, greenhouse construction, native plant gardening, and education with K-12 school groups both on preserves and in classrooms. I also received experience working alongside many different types of employees at the land trust, from the Education and Volunteer Director, the Field Biologist, the Director of Land Transactions, and the Director of Mitigation and Land Management. Unfortunately, I also witnessed some workplace conflict between some AmeriCorps interns and their bosses at SRT, which taught me that although everyone in the environmental field wants to make a positive impact, it is not always "sunshine and rainbows", and employees can feel slighted by their employers and bosses and dissatisfied with their wages, even if they believe in the work they are doing. Through this experience, I realized that

the best way for me to find meaningful employment in the environmental field while making a decent wage was by first pursuing higher education.

After my SRT internship ended, I began attending UC Berkeley. In my first semester at Berkeley, I decided to challenge myself and take an upper-division course, Animal Behavior, due to my love for wildlife and desire to better understand them. I also accepted an internship with CALPIRG (California Public Interest Research Group), where I spent a great deal of my free time flagging down my fellow Berkeley students to sign up for and pledge 10\$ a semester to CALPIRG and gathering signatures for the "Save the Bees" campaign which sought to ban neonicotinoids, bee-killing pesticides, from Alameda County. In the Spring 2020 semester, while taking some of my favorite classes including Political Ecology, where I learned to critically analyze socio-environmental conflicts, the COVID-19 pandemic forced all classes online, and I soon realized it wasn't necessary to live in Berkeley anymore. I decided it was best to move back to my hometown of Hanford, CA. I also decided to graduate early, and I received my Bachelor's of Science in December 2020.

After returning to Hanford, I soon turned to the same means of income that my family has done for decades: agriculture. My grandfather, the son of farm-laborers and immigrants from Spain, has been farming his whole life and still has an orchard of orange, tangerine, and lemon trees. In his elderly age, I knew he would appreciate help pruning, harvesting, fertilizing, and transporting the citrus to the food banks he donates to. Soon I wanted a farm of my own, and found a passion for growing kale. Growing kale organically in an area with lots of gophers and other rodents has taught me how to have a productive farm while working with the environment rather than against it. I construct my own raised beds with non-lethal rodent barriers using metal wire. Selling the organic kale gives me satisfaction because I am helping my customers be healthy, and I love working outdoors, but I am not making the difference in environmental conservation I would like. I believe Evergreen State can help me refocus on my true passion of protecting endangered wildlife.