STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

After learning about Dr. Robert T. Paine's research on keystone species in seventh grade, I realized I wanted to pursue a career in the environmental field. The concept that all individuals within a system play a significant role in the maintenance of a balanced community and the detrimental effects caused by the population depletion of a crucial species fascinated me instantly. As I explored Paine's research further, I learned that the research was conducted in my home state of Washington. I realized that revolutionary advancements in biological insight were happening in my own backyard, and I sought to be a part of it.

As an aspiring graduate student in the Master of Environmental Studies program, my journey reflects the pursuit of finding my own ecological niche within the vast landscape of contemporary research. Much like species occupying their place within an ecosystem, I am driven to identify and contribute to the interconnected realms of forest ecology and conservation. In pursuing graduate studies, my overarching goal is to bridge the gap between humanity and the environment, fostering an inclusive dialogue that engages all communities, especially the underserved. I believe in an 'all hands on deck' approach to ecological restoration and habitat protection, emphasizing the critical role of identifying and mitigating crucial human-nature interactions. Through my research and subsequent community engagement, I aim to empower individuals to care about and contribute to their sustainability efforts, fostering a collective commitment to safeguarding our ecosystems for future generations.

Two of the main topics I am interested in researching are forest ecology and conservation. In the summer of 2022, I worked as a restoration ecology intern at the Fish and Wildlife program at the Joint Base Lewis-McChord. Throughout this internship, I learned about the unique oak savanna ecosystem present at the base and the forested habitat that bordered it. As an intern, I monitored the status of several endangered or threatened native species including the Taylor's checkerspot butterfly, Mazama pocket gopher, western pond turtle, and more using geospatial information systems. I also worked alongside woodland firefighters to prepare for prescribed burns. These prescribed burns were not only valuable for their efficacy in invasive removal, reduction of wildfire risk, and nutrient release into the soil but also for the opportunity to involve local tribes in this process as well.

After earning my graduate degree, I plan on staying in academia to fulfill my goal of becoming a professor to teach and conduct research within the environmental field. During my undergraduate career, I tutored biology with the University of Washington's TriBeta Honor Society. This opportunity challenged me to break down complicated biological processes into their smallest forms, which would allow others to easily digest and learn from. I realized I loved being able to support my peers' learning about environmental topics and encourage them. If given the opportunity, I would love to apply my creativity and logic to address the nuances of environmental issues. I am committed to communicating my work in a clear and accessible manner, allowing everyone to understand my research and be inspired to apply it for positive change in their community and environment.

My graduate training at Evergreen will help me specialize in my study interests and refine my research skills with an ardent community. The opportunity to work with and learn from faculty who have conducted research while teaching would be invaluable to me, as someone who hopes to follow down this path. Furthermore, my degree would represent a significant steppingstone in my aspirations to contribute to my community by advocating for sustainable practices. In my current position at the Pierce Conservation District as the AmeriCorps Farm and Habitat Specialist, I have had the pleasure of working directly with farmers and habitat stewards to implement sustainable management practices on their land. Whether it be the process of installing a hedgerow on a farm or encouraging the use of cover crops, I can stand by the research-backed practices that are best for the environment and improve the quality of life for humans. One invaluable element of this position is the trust and relationship-building prospects between me and our cooperators. With this degree, my goal is to maintain strong connections with members of my community, serving as a dependable resource and offering innovative solutions to environmental challenges through my research, all in support of promoting sustainability.

In conclusion, my interest in the environmental field began with the awe-inspiring concept of keystone species in seventh grade, leading me to the revolutionary research of Dr. Robert T. Paine. Little did I know at the time that the very land of my home state held the core of current biological advancements, fueling my desire to contribute to the ongoing ecological research. As I envision my future as a graduate student at Evergreen, I see it as a continuation of my quest to find my ecological niche within the intricate network of research. Like the dynamic relationships within an ecosystem, I am drawn to the interconnected realms of forest ecology and conservation, recognizing the urgent need to address the profound impacts of human activities on our environment.

The 'all hands on deck' approach I advocate for is not just a theoretical concept; it's a call to action. My experiences as a restoration ecology intern and my current role as a Farm and Habitat Specialist have equipped me with the practical knowledge to engage with communities and implement sustainable practices. The trust and relationships built in these roles emphasize the importance of reliable, research-backed solutions in fostering positive environmental change. Looking forward, my graduate training at the School of Environmental and Forest Sciences will not only refine my research skills but also solidify my commitment to contributing to my community. The supportive academic environment and the opportunity to work with experienced faculty who seamlessly blend research and teaching will undoubtedly shape my path. In essence, my journey is not just a personal pursuit but a commitment to empower individuals, dismantle barriers, and inspire positive change.