

Statement of Purpose
The Evergreen State College
Master of Environmental Education
John Perry

I am not originally from Washington, but Colorado has a very similar, “get outdoors” atmosphere, that my mother embraced. Camping on public land was cheap, so it was easy for a single parent in the 1980’s to introduce her children to adventure. Then and now, the Denver Public School System understands the importance of getting inner city children outside. In fifth grade, everyone attends a week of field craft and environmental education in the mountains with their classmates. These memories likely ignited what can only be described as intrinsic motivation, or maybe even an entanglement with the environment.

I joined the Army early, at the age of 17 between my junior and senior year in high school. I saw that as the only way I would be able to attend college and it was an opportunity to see the world; which I have. Twelve years later, biology degree in hand, I was selected to become an Engineering Officer. A role I would hold for the remainder of my 20-year Army career. Although science was not my “assigned duty”, I sought roles that resulted in a positive effect on the environment through volunteering or extra-curricular activities. During two of my combat deployments to Iraq, I accepted the additional duty of the Environmental Officer. I helped complete complex projects like closing a horrendous open burn-pit in Tikrit, Iraq. I shadowed a preventative medicine organization conducting soil samples, hanging up fly traps and informing Soldiers of their surroundings to limit the spread of infectious disease. During my three years in Italy, I developed, pitched, and established the Green Boot Program. A concept that spread geographically across three different installations. In practice, junior leaders are empowered to incentivize the act of recycling, saving energy, and reducing pollution through friendly competition, resulting in time off or organizational field trips. Professionally, I was also able to continue my personal development by completing a Master of Science degree in Geologic Engineering and a project management professional (PMP) certification in 2017. The capstone was the design of a Phyto-remediation project in rural Arkansas using poplar trees to remedy contaminated ground water.

These days I view my work with the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) equally as important as my past responsibility for the welfare of Soldiers. Upon leaving the Army in 2019, I knew that I wanted to pursue a career in natural resources and joined the DNR following an internship. In that time, my work was fun and adventurous, but the last two years have been the most impactful. I was selected to create a program that helps the Federal Service conduct National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) planning on National Forest System land under the

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Good Neighbor Authority. The projects are only restoration and occur at the forest or watershed level. Our team of six adds much needed capacity to both the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) across all of Washington. Last year, three of us literally walked 700 miles across two percent of the entire Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. We installed autonomous recording units to passively track the distribution of endangered Northern Spotted Owls to inform the pending amendment to the Northwest Forest Plan. Additionally, we use the same technology to delineate Marbled Murrelet habitat. We have mapped and field verified geologic hazards and avoided risks like the Oso landslide that occurred in 2008. We conduct pedestrian surveys and shovel probes for cultural resource management and the list goes on.

In all of my time at the DNR, mapping, natural science, analysis and practical decision making transparently with the public have been keys to project success. My search for a certificate in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) led me down the path of continuing education. With a bit more self-reflection, I came to realize that pursuing a Master of Environmental Studies graduate degree with a focus on GIS would not only improve those skills, but also open the door for more discussion. This program is a good fit for me because it aligns with what has already become a passionate pursuit professionally. Consequently, I believe that I am a good fit for this program because I have relevant experience in forest restoration, not only on public lands but across boundaries with industrial and private landowners.

The thought of getting back into academics is thrilling. I look forward to engaging with classmates and professors in critical thinking towards positive environmental stewardship.