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Statement of Purpose

It is with great enthusiasm and gratitude that I submit my application for the Master of Environmental Studies program at The Evergreen State College.

During my undergraduate years, I participated in an intensive two-year program called INVST Community Leadership that focused on social and environmental justice and equipped us with experience and skills for careers in this sector. Together with a cohort of 17 other students, I was fortunate to tour the US southwest to learn about the fossil fuel industry, renewable energy alternatives, environmental impacts on community health, and sustainable living solutions such as "Earthship Biotecture" homes. It became clear to me that responding to complex issues is possible when dedicated individuals are willing to listen and learn, be creative, and take a holistic approach to environmental challenges.

Upon graduating from the University of Colorado Boulder with my bachelor's in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and certificate in Community Leadership, I imagined combining both of these educational tracks and passions in a nonprofit role doing ecological conservation. To begin, I accepted a part-time position that fulfilled part of this dream with the nonprofit National Scholarship Providers Association (NSPA). My heart was being called to the rainforests and rocky coastlines of the Pacific Northwest, so later that year I accepted a role with one of their member organizations in Washington state - WWIN. I established a life in Seattle, briefly explored other career paths and opportunities, and ended up returning to WWIN full time in 2019. We are a small team of five supporting 150 scholars each year, and I have been deeply grateful for the opportunity as program director to work alongside my direct report, the program coordinator, in building strong relationships with our scholars and alumnae. I have led with a compassionate, collaborative, and mission-driven approach while centering our scholars' voices to design equitable, impactful programs. In one of those serendipitous moments in which life comes full circle, I spoke at an NSPA summit in 2021 and attended their conference in 2022 and 2023. Though this has been truly rewarding work, a part of me has always known that I am called to environmental conservation.

More than anything, I love to be outside and to learn all that I can about the natural world. As an avid reader and critical thinker, I am always finding ways to expand my knowledge - poring over my field guide to identify native plants and devouring books about animal senses, plant biology, climate activism, and soil ecology. Since December 2023, I have volunteered weekly with an animal sanctuary that rescues pigs, cows, and fowl. This year, I became enchanted with birding and completed several classes and field trips with Birds Connect Seattle including "Fall Shorebirds", "Glorious Gulls", and "Intro to Raptors". This hunger and aptitude for science has been in my bones since childhood and is only deepening. With the impacts and urgency of climate change becoming more apparent every season, I want to focus my life and work on exploring solutions and creating positive change for this planet that I care for.

For this reason, I am committed to transitioning to a role with an environmental focus. In pursuit of this goal, I joined Ecologists without Borders (EcoWB) in February 2024 as a volunteer on the projects committee to support international community-led ecological projects. I now help manage a team of volunteers and am a point of contact for an agroforestry project in Fiji. Re-engaging with ecology work has made it clear to me that it is not too late to pivot back toward my true calling and has solidified my intention to pursue a master's degree in environmental studies.

Working in the higher education landscape in Washington, I have been familiar with Evergreen for years and have always been drawn to your emphasis on collaborative, interdisciplinary learning and your commitment to social justice and environmental stewardship. When I began exploring graduate options, the MES program immediately stood out as the perfect fit in terms of values alignment, possible areas of study, faculty, and location. I greatly appreciated the opportunity to meet with Averil and learn about the elective offerings including Field Ornithology, Tropical Ecology, Wildlife Responses to Climate Change, and electives through your sister program, the Master of Public Administration. The areas of study that I am particularly drawn to are restoration ecology, ecofeminism, and climate justice, and I am already envisioning how I could curate the ideal combination of coursework to pursue research opportunities, learn about traditional ecological knowledge, and prepare for my career as an environmental leader.

Evergreen's emphasis on social justice is also particularly important to me. For over four years, I have been a member and rotating facilitator with the INVST Antiracism Study Group. We are a supportive community that meets weekly. Together, we have read over 20 books addressing institutional racism, sexism, and other forms of systemic oppression. I believe that social justice work involves lifelong learning and a personal commitment to co-creating diverse, inclusive communities of mutual respect and belonging.

When friends inquire about my new enthusiasm for birding, I try to describe the way it goes beyond mere hobby and truly captures the worldview I strive to cultivate. It reminds me to slow down, carefully notice and appreciate who is around, and to delight in the small details - specific songs and calls, flashy or inconspicuous coloration patterns, the migratory routes that brought a particular bird thousands of miles to reach this exact tree in my neighborhood. I believe it is this joyful noticing and deeper understanding of individuals and interconnected systems that inspires us to imagine the best version of our world so that we, as humans, can take on a more positive symbiotic role in the ecosystem and live respectfully with the more-than-human world.

It would be a great privilege to join the MES program and fulfill my calling to follow this path. Thank you for your time and consideration.