

Statement of Purpose

After earning my undergraduate degree in Computer Science and Engineering and spending nearly a decade building a career as a software developer, it may seem at first glance that my decision to pursue a graduate degree in Environmental Studies is an abrupt departure from my background. However, my interest in the natural world has been a defining part of my life for as long as I can remember. My decision to follow the path towards becoming a programmer was born through the fear of the unknown, and a belief that software development would be more predictable and financially stable than any of the environmental fields that I was considering. Now, with the clarity and confidence that come from years of professional experience, I am eager to align my career with my lifelong passion.

Growing up, I was captivated by the complexity and beauty of the natural world. As a child, I dreamed of pursuing careers that ranged from more academic focused fields like geology or forest ecology, to hands-on fields like wilderness survival instruction or law enforcement as a National Park Service ranger. My love for nature was not just a passing interest—it was something I actively pursued. In my younger years, I spent hours assembling field guides and binders to catalog plant species, inspired by my early camping experiences. In high school, I regularly embarked on backpacking trips, immersing myself in nature so I could better understand and connect with the natural world. Between semesters in college, I worked at a summer camp in a remote forested area, where I had the privilege of introducing inner-city children to the wonders of the outdoors. This experience reinforced my deep appreciation for environmental education and the power of nature to inspire and transform lives. Even when I ultimately chose computer science, I gravitated toward natural science courses for my general education requirements, particularly plant biology. The decision to stay in software development

was driven by a fear of the unknown, but I have since realized that I was capable of forging a path in environmental studies all along.

After nearly a decade in software development, I began to feel a disconnect between my professional work and my deeper values. When I first moved to Washington, I started to personally experience the mounting climatic catastrophe. Year after year I have witnessed increasingly larger and more devastating wildfires burn thousands of miles of forest and homes. I have been repeatedly assured by long-time residents that the extreme heat and lack of rain in the summers are uncharacteristic for the region, only occurring to this extent within the last decade or so. As I've watched these changes unfold, I have felt increasingly compelled to become part of the solution rather than remain a passive observer. Meanwhile I was experiencing burnout working as a software developer. Around this time I read a quote by Maya Angelou that deeply resonated with me: *"You can only become truly accomplished at something you love. Don't make money your goal. Instead, pursue the things you love doing..."* These words served as the catalyst towards seeking a career change. I began researching environmental careers and local academic programs, which led me to The Evergreen State College. When I discovered the Master of Environmental Studies program, I felt that I was heading down a path that I had always been seeking.

Evergreen's interdisciplinary and experiential approach to education immediately stood out to me. The ability to integrate scientific and social perspectives aligns perfectly with my intellectual curiosity and my desire to address environmental challenges in a holistic way. After speaking with the Assistant Director of the MES program, I began the necessary steps to meet prerequisite requirements by enrolling in natural and social science courses this winter. These classes have continued to encourage and reaffirm the path I am pursuing now, and have inspired

a deep interest in Indigenous culture and knowledge in the Pacific Northwest. Attending thesis presentations from the current MES cohort played a pivotal role in helping me narrow down a focus as I was particularly drawn towards the research projects of students who are mentored or guided by Sarah Hamman, whose expertise in fire ecology and environmental restoration aligns closely with my developing interests. I hope to take more of her courses and gain a foundation in fire science and ecological restoration. While I will remain open minded to focusing my studies in any of the fields I get a chance to explore in the MES program, I find myself particularly drawn to Indigenous ecological knowledge after taking my social science course this quarter. I hope to integrate my interest in fire science, land stewardship, and environmental restoration with Indigenous cultural knowledge and experience, and ultimately provide value towards environmental policy and restoration efforts.

Regardless of the specializations that I may gravitate towards, I aim to develop the skills and expertise necessary to enable me to be successful in my new career path. I am eager to immerse myself further at Evergreen and work alongside faculty and peers who share my commitment to environmental sustainability. I look forward to this opportunity to grow and I appreciate your consideration of my candidacy to join the next MES cohort in the Fall of 2025.