Bilezikian:

Kendall Hardy

I've called myself an environmentalist for the majority of my life, however, it wasn't until my undergraduate years that I became an activist beyond merely educating myself and attending protests. This is when I truly found myself identifying as an advocate and protector of the natural world. At Western Washington University, I narrowed my studies to the field of Anthropology, where I drew correlations between the emergence of modern industrial civilization and widespread environmental degradation. I found this connection to be deeply concerning and overwhelming, so I joined an organization called "Transition Whatcom," which is focused on building resilient, self-sustaining communities around Whatcom County. I spoke about peak oil and community resistance and resilience on panels, worked on various organic farms and gardens, supported many conservation projects, and attended and spoke at city council meetings to help pass a resolution that promoted alternatives to fossil fuels in Bellingham, Washington. After college, I landed a position with the Washington Conservation Corps as a trail/restoration crew member, and fell in love with conservation ecology. I felt as though I had discovered the perfect career path for me – a way to make a positive environmental impact within my community on a day-to-day basis. As an advocate for developing an appreciation of our natural ecosystems through hiking and exploring the outdoors, I would often volunteer myself for trail work on my time off. I was hooked on the idea of making ecological work my career, and I've been following that path ever since. For the past couple of years I have been working as a biological technician on a botany crew in the South Puget Sound prairies, where I perform habitat quality assessments. I love the work that I do, however, I want to be fully prepared for setting up and analyzing my own research and understanding and implementing environmental policy so that I can further my career and bolster the growing body of scientific knowledge within the field. With the immediate threat to our public lands growing stronger, I find that I am especially drawn to the world of environmental policy and affecting change through navigating our political system. I think the Master of Environmental Studies program at Evergreen will be the optimal place for me to explore how environmental science and policy can be melded together for an integrated approach to solving environmental issues. My goals throughout the MES program are to gain an expansive knowledge base of environmental issues, explore the relationship between prescribed fire and ecological preservation, examine the roles of environmental and public policy, and pursue noteworthy research in one or two of these areas of interest. After completing the MES program, I plan on applying to PhD programs and hope to work as a scientist focusing on environmental policy issues. I am confident that Evergreen could provide a platform for these pursuits and serve as an excellent launching point to a lifetime of learning from and protecting our remaining wild lands.

Diane Nelson

As a nature lover living in cities, I was drawn to restoring urban creeks that persist amongst the paved streets. As someone committed to social justice, I was deeply conflicted when homeless encampments were displaced by the restoration projects I worked on. This concern lead me to recognize a need within the field of habitat restoration for cross-disciplinary approaches that address the complex challenges of urban environments. Receiving the Sara Bilezikian Fellowship will allow me to attend The Evergreen College Master of Environmental Science graduate program. In this fertile environment I will produce a habitat restoration methodology that addresses the needs of homeless communities. Working for The Watershed Nursery, a California native plant nursery that provides restoration services, gave me a foundation in habitat restoration. I worked on mitigating runoff and creating wildlife corridors to help mend the many ways cities have impacted the ecosystems they are built within. While restoring riparian zones throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, I began to see a link between the marginalization of urban creeks and of the people who sought refuge along them. Homeless encampments are often located in the few remaining wild spaces, hidden from the public eye. These encampments are unveiled and displaced when they exist in an area undergoing restoration, causing further harm to those already experiencing the trauma of homelessness. It became evident to me that practitioners are not prepared to handle situations such as these because the field of habitat restoration lacks a critique of how this work impacts homeless communities. We can imagine restoring an entire riparian zone, but not the lives of the most marginalized people living in it. As the propagation manager at the nonprofit Ploughshares Nursery, a work training program that employs formerly homeless individuals, I developed relationships with many of my co-workers. Through these relationships, I learned of the toll being homeless had taken on their lives. The stories they told inspire me to engage in habitat restoration practices that account for a broad range of human interactions. The interdisciplinary nature of The Evergreen College Master of Environmental Science graduate program will enable me to collaborate with professionals from a range of fields and create workable strategies that will bring the most equity to urban restoration projects. Like Sara, I envision a more just and egalitarian world and I am dedicated to working towards this vision with all the resources available to me. Receiving the Sara Bilezikian Fellowship will ensure that I am able to develop a habitat restoration praxis that can restore ecosystems and the lives of the most marginalized in urban areas.

Brian Stewart:

 I was born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, spending all of my life in a region of unrivaled pulchritude. As an adolescent my family took me on annual and sometimes bi-annual trips to Mt. Rainier (Tahoma), local state parks, the Olympic rain forest, most trips for a week, others longer. This early exposure to the local environment cultivated an incessant and profound love of the state and of nature in a general sense. This love of nature I share with my children, and guaranteeing that the local nature persists into their futures is something I have deemed worth fighting for. I went on to spend my life playing music semi-professionally at night, and working in the R.V business during the day. The R.V business was the best way I knew how, to stay abstractly connected to the outdoors, by helping others and outfitting them to explore wilderness and nature at large. As a low income individual with no one in my family attending college before myself, I was unsure I could in fact attend and be successful in college, so I spent many years unsure of what to do. Eventually I went back to school (the first in my family to seek higher education) for music in attempt to further my musical career and to move away from R.V.s. However, during my time working on my music business degree, I was forced to take a couple science classes, and my interest was piqued in science and specifically science related to protecting and understanding my beloved environment. Since then I have completely thrown myself into the study of the environment, pushing myself to excel at the academic curriculum. My interest has only grown overtime, perpetuating my educational ambitions and pushing me towards ever higher levels of educational understanding. My new paradigm is one of seeking solutions to environmental challenges, asking the questions, what can I do to preserve, conserve, educate and facilitate environmental stewardship and sustainability? I am now actively seeking ways in which I can help to guarantee a working planet for my children’s children. During this time of intellectual exploration I have discovered a couple specialized areas I have found myself focusing research on and areas I want to work on after graduation. First, habitat fragmentation due to roadways in the state of Washington, a subject I hope to go into further during my time as a graduate student. Second, the conservation and preservation of Pacific Northwest ecosystems, and the promotion of local biodiversity in a human dominated landscape. Lastly, education interest me greatly, teaching and sharing with others to spread sustainable knowledge is another passion of mine. Synthesizing scientific literature into accessible literature for the masses to encourage the average person to get involved, is another aspect of education I am currently interested in.

Karimot Afolabi:

 Most human activities depend on water usage; the importance of water to human life can never be over emphasized. Over the years people in my community, Nigeria to be precise do not have access to potable water and this has exposed them to life threatening diseases and even death in some cases, simply because of the sources of water used for cooking, bathing, drinking and for other domestic purposes. These sources vary from rain water fetched from asbestos and rusted aluminum roofing sheet which is toxic to human health, fetching from river which often times is polluted with human faeces and fetching from well in a society where soak-away system is still the order of the day. These are my experiences in my early years that motivated me to study Environmental Management and Toxicology for my Bachelors degree. This was the beginning of my quest to find solution to the water pollution problem in my immediate society. My research area for my Bachelors degree was on water treatment and my relentless environmental protection desire led me to Masters Degree in Environmental Chemistry and Pollution Control. I continued my research on sustainable water treatment because my childhood goal was to find a modern and better way of removing pollutants from water that is used commonly by local residents and create awareness on it. I had my Internship at my State Environmental Protection Agency to ensure I can reach out to people and create awareness about the risks associated with the use of polluted water. I have been an advocate of environmental protection especially as it relates to water since my teenage years and the passion for the environment has kept me on the path as I intend to use my academic knowledge to further alleviate this societal problem and save lives of many. A global perspective and desire to perfectly improve our practices back home led me to Evergreen State College which has the core areas I intend to focus on. I am particularly interested in some core areas of study at Evergreen which include Water Management and Environmental Education and to further improve my current research on water treatment through adsorption of metals and my environmental advocacy. It will be a dream come true to see reduction of water borne diseases and death of children and adult. It will be a lifetime achievement when each and every person in my community understands the risks of polluted water and refrain from it. As an academician working in University environment in a developing country like Nigeria, funds is a determinant factor between success and failure in the research world. Given this golden opportunity, it will broaden my horizon and knowledge, positively impact the students that I teach and also expose me to modern or better ways of solving the water pollution problem plaguing our society. The multiplier effects will be felt by hundreds of thousands of people back home in Nigeria that will benefit upon the completion of my studies .

Paris McClusky

I received my Bachelor of Arts from The Evergreen State College in 2009, with a focus in music and history. Until recently, I had not considered the extent to which I could fully integrate my artistic life with my passion for environmentalism. I can now envision the unique role that I could play in the movement for sustainability and environmental justice.  I am applying to the Master of Environmental Studies Program with a primary focus in wilderness protection and conservation. I believe that my background in interdisciplinary education, my artistic and creative development and a solid basis in environmental studies will prepare me for a multifaceted career as an environmental leader.      Growing up in a very rural part of Northern California, I spent most of my early years surrounded by nature.  As a teenager, I took courses in bioregionalism, where I learned ways to decrease my impact on the environment.  At the same time, I was introduced to transcendentalist naturalist thinkers like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau.  I was most inspired by the pioneering environmental work of Rachel Carson, especially her iconic book, Silent Spring. These philosophies and analyses of humanity’s relationship with nature paired with practical applications for improving and repairing this bond helped me develop a solid foundation of environmental education. As I deepened my understanding of ecology and the reciprocal nature of humans and the environment, a growing sense of responsibility led me to environmental activism.  I spent the next four years working with Earth First, and a northern California based group, Friends of Headwaters, demonstrating, organizing, canvassing and raising community awareness to affect environmental change.      Environmental themes have been a guiding influence in every aspect of my life, including my creative endeavors.  One such example is an instrumental piece of music called “Rise of Tides” that was inspired by a backpacking trip I took from the Hoh River Valley to Blue Glacier in the Olympic Mountain Range. Another example was a collaborative performance art piece called Thaw for which I co-composed and performed the score.      My overall goal for entering this graduate program is to preserve and protect wilderness, particularly wilderness areas of the Pacific Northwest.  More specifically, I wish to contribute to modern conservation efforts to connect large wildlife preserves with wildlife corridors.  I want to combine music and performance art, blogging and nature photography with a firm foundation in the natural and social sciences.  I believe that an interdisciplinary approach to conveying and promoting environmental ideas will reach and connect the greatest number of people possible. The need to protect and preserve wilderness is essential to the coexistence of human and non-human animals and the health and growth of all life in the ecosystems of our bioregion in the Pacific Northwest and beyond, now and for generations to come.