**MES gCORE, Fall 2018 Field Trip**

In the first quarter of every MES student’s time at Evergreen, we embark on an unforgettable journey, an initiation of sorts, solidifying our place in the program. The class, Conceptualizing Our Regional Environment (gCORE), sends students on a three-day field trip with each fall’s new cohort. We spent countless hours in the vans in order to see what spectacular landscapes and cultural heritage the Olympic Peninsula has to offer. We lucked out on the peninsula in mid-October with beautiful sunny days and mild weather. By the end of the trip, jumbled group of strangers quickly became a friendly cohort in the course of those three days.

**Day 1**

Here we focused on the recent [Elwha dam removal project](http://projects.seattletimes.com/2016/elwha/). We visited the Elwha dam removal site to see the remains of the old dam. At this site, we heard from Patrick Crain, who is a National Park Service biologist working on the dam removal monitoring project. He talked to us about the entire process –before, during and after – of dam removal. Next we visited the Lower Elwha Klallam hatchery, where John Mahan, a fisheries biologist for the hatchery, took us on a tour of the facilities, and patiently answered all of our questions. Last but not least, Rebecca Paradis, a Natural Resource Biologist for the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe, led groups to the mouth of the Elwha River. We walked across a pebbled sand bar that had never been there before the dam removal project, and saw firsthand just how dramatically the river’s mouth has changed.

**Day 2**

The second day of the trip was split between two parts of the peninsula. We spent the morning in Neah Bay and Cape Flattery. In Neah Bay, we took a tour of the [Makah museum](https://makahmuseum.com/) led by Makah tribal members. We talked about the ongoing struggle to regain their whaling rights and hold on to their culture after years of repression. At [Cape Flattery](https://www.wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/cape-flattery), we were free to explore the northwestern most corner of the contiguous United States. Those of us who had seen the cape before relished the sunshine and visibility, and those of us who had never seen the cape were primed for a desire to return again soon.

In the afternoon of the second day, we traveled to La Push, which was near the [Olympic Natural Resources Center](http://www.onrc.washington.edu/) in Forks, the accommodation we were staying in for the duration of our journey. At La Push, we talked with Baine Efferty, a fish biologist for the tribe, about the ongoing salmon restoration projects. We also saw some of the [Quileute](https://quileutenation.org/) efforts to move La Push to higher ground to reduce risk of rising sea levels and tsunamis. After the talk, we spent the remaining time before dinner on the beautiful sandy beach that frames La Push. Taking full advantage of the weather, one student brought swimming gear and jumped right in. Dipping my feet in was enough for me to know how cold the Pacific in October can be!

**Day 3**

The third and final day of the field trip was spent at the [Hoh Rainforest](https://www.nps.gov/olym/planyourvisit/visiting-the-hoh.htm) in [Olympic National Park](https://www.nps.gov/olym/index.htm), learning how to identify potential spotted owl and marbled murrelet habitat, as well as identifying the common trees in the forest. The cohort split into small groups and dispersed themselves amongst the trails, challenging our observation skills.

As we made our way back to Evergreen along highway 101, a couple of vans made a voluntary final stop at the [Kalaloch](https://www.nps.gov/olym/planyourvisit/visiting-kalaloch-and-ruby-beach.htm) Campground to see a pretty spectacular tree. It is unofficially dubbed a “fairy tree,” and certainly worthy of the ethereal moniker. Despite having little soil to hold itself in place, this tree persists, much as I hope we all will through the remainder of our time in the MES program.

**Take Aways**

Coming in to this field trip primed with some understanding of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), we appreciated the impact of tribes in the Olympic peninsula. At the Lower Elwha Klallam Hatchery we visited on day one, we saw the use of a hatchery as a nursery for salmon, rather than a fish farm. The TEK of this practice stresses the importance of a healthy fish population, not just for the sake of fishing.

Also on the first day, when Rebecca Paradis spoke to us at the mouth of the Elwha River, she mentioned one of the ways that tribal governance of the area allows for different management tactics. To learn what the fish are eating, her organization knocks them out and forces up their stomach content. The typical procedure to knock out a fish involves a chemical which is shown to be carcinogenic to humans, but because of tribal governance, they are able to use clove oil instead to the same effect, even though it is [not an approved fish medication by the USFWS](https://www.fws.gov/fisheries/aadap/aquaculture.html). This example of TEK at work highlights the creative solutions utilized under tribal governance.

On the way into and out of La Push on day two we drove past the future site of the Quileute village. On either side of the road, swaths of the forest have been cut to make way for the government and public structures that will be built there. [Moving a town](https://mthg.org/) is a massive undertaking, and the Quileute are making it happen to protect themselves from projected sea level rise and the expectation of increasing tsunami risk. This strategy emphasizes the unified community aspect of TEK, how the Quileute can come together and move villages.

The second day held another TEK lesson for the first year students, and that is in the cultural significance of whales to the Makah people, as we saw on our tours of their museum. Whaling is a sensitive subject in the global community, but the museum tours explained the vital role that whales serve to the Makah people; their culture is largely based in their place as a whaling people. When asked to at least reduce the whale’s suffering, the Makah hunters on [the 1999 whale hunt](http://www.historylink.org/File/5310) killed the gray whale faster than any human had done before, according to Spencer, one of the guides, showing their ability to rise to the challenge.

These lessons in Traditional Ecological Knowledge framed our trip to the Olympic Peninsula, and the lessons have been significant players in our coursework once back at Evergreen. The perspectives provided, like the trip itself, will stay with us until long after we have all left the MES program.