This experience has truly taught me so much about working on a long term project. I have worked on projects for school before, but nothing as long term and individual as this experience. The first, and possibly the most important thing this project has taught me was how to effectively communicate with others, and keep an honest dialogue going. Sometimes it can be overwhelming to take on a project that you are completing for someone else, but it is so important to be honest with yourself and others on what you can realistically accomplish. I'm sure I am not alone in this, but I am a huge people pleaser, so my initial reaction to everything asked of me is to say yes. I have learned that in the long run that isn't better for anyone. I would rather have a smaller project, that is of such better quality, than a project that feels like it's a lot, but it really has no substance.

Through the project I have learned about The Alliance for the Mystic River Watershed, which is an impressive group. The work they do to protect and preserve the environment is truly inspirational, and motivated me to complete this project to the best of my ability. Maggie Favretti, first chair director of the Alliance, was a tremendous help during the project by fostering a great dynamic where I could bounce ideas off of her and ask her any questions big or small. I was able to research the environment in the area and what climate change impacts they are experiencing. From there it allowed me to gather enough information to put into a survey. This survey might have been the most fun part of this project. To create something that people will actually be able to use feels super satisfying. The website I created was also an exciting way to share all of my work from this semester and have a place that explains the survey in detail. The initial idea was for the Alliance to have an app, where people could go on and fill out observations. It was clear from the start that I wasn't able to create an app, my job was to collect all the information that this app would need to make sense. We quickly realized that it would make sense to create an actual survey, so there was a tool that the Alliance could actually use. As I started thinking about my final presentation, I realized that instead of an app, I could create my own website. This way, there was an actual place that people could access and learn about my project and the survey. The website has everything from my final report to the survey.

The course that I took in the fall semester in preparation for this independent study was a huge contributor to my success this semester. I had learned so much background information that was key to this project. Dr. Julianna Barrett, Renata Berttoti, and Mary Looney were a joy to work with throughout the past year. It can be hard to find classes at a school as big as UConn, where you feel connected to the professors. I really enjoyed working with my classmates and professors all year, where class felt more like a discussion than a lecture. This class was so different from anything I have done during my last 3 years, which felt very refreshing. And unlike most classes, I have an actual project and proof of my work from the whole semester that I can share with others.

The biggest challenge in this whole project was creating a scope of work. The scope of work was challenging because it forced you to set goals in the beginning, create dates, and have an idea of where you wanted to take your project. This was overwhelming to begin with, because there are so many options of where you could go. I learned how important it is to be realistic and set deadlines for yourself. These deadlines helped hold me accountable, when there wasn't someone else doing it. It can become easy to push work off to the next week when you don't have constant assignments to do. I definitely learned quickly that it is important to work on the project every week and to not push it to the side.

This project is far from over and there is so much room for someone else to come in and pick up where I left off. The first step I would take would be to collect the data and analyze what people are seeing, and make the information available to the public. Another idea that Maggie and I had was for there to be a spot for people to ask questions on what they are seeing. The end goal would be for someone to be on the other end and answering questions if they arise. It would also be great if someone was able to hold informational seminars about what's going on in the community. This way people can come together and talk and learn about what they are experiencing. It would be so important to get the youth involved because they are the future.

Overall, this project has been such a great experience and by far one of my favorite classes at UConn. I highly recommend anyone interested in taking this course to do it!