Climate Corps Reflection

Working on this climate adaptation project with the Alliance for the Mystic River Watershed has been a journey of growth and learning. The goal of the project was to curate complex environmental and mapping data in a way audiences find meaningful, and an initial challenge I faced was refining the scope of the project. As the project scope changed during the first two months, I learned to adapt and adjust timelines while staying in alignment with the original objectives. When the spatial data layers folder and master spreadsheet were made available, there was an extremely comprehensive list of spatial data for this project that I had to narrow down to select the main themes that I wanted to work with and could realistically accomplish this semester. I ultimately decided to focus on the story of water and create a living narrative of water in the watershed supported by embedded and edited spatial data layers related to the quality of our waterways and human impacts on the watershed. Other challenges I had to overcome in this project were project management, adhering to the timeline outlined in the scope, organizing meetings, and effective communication with the community partners at the Alliance to be able to successfully carry out the goals and deliverables to share in a presentation with community members in May.

My favorite part of the project was working with the Alliance for the Mystic River Watershed and learning about their co-leadership with Tribal Nations and Connecticut towns as well as the youth programs they run. After concurrently taking the Indigenous Geographies in Abya Yala and Turtle Island course at UConn this semester with Professor Alexandra Lamiña, I further recognize the importance of collaborating with Indigenous communities in climate adaptation and highlighting their knowledge as vital to these efforts. Caring for their land and water, the Alliance for the Mystic River Watershed is an inspiring organization because of the heart that surrounds their efforts in improving community resilience through creative,

interdisciplinary approaches that advance environmental and ecological justice. Working on separate projects for the Alliance with two other Climate Corps students was also meaningful in seeing how our projects fit together and support climate resilience efforts for the Alliance. Learning about their impactful Citizen Science and Watershed Family Album projects expanded my perspectives and helped me believe in a resilient future through inspired possibilities.

The course contributed to my personal and professional goals in climate storytelling. Having the creative freedom to choose StoryMaps as the format of the GIS curation and having the chance to focus on the storytelling side of the project was rewarding as I noticed how this project goes beyond the environmental data and mapping side to harness the power of stories. Other than engaging with science communications through curation, I am grateful for the opportunity to improve my skills in spatial data collection, GIS, and ArcGIS StoryMaps. I could not have carried out this project without the Alliance's GIS expert Cam McClure's support on collecting spatial data, demonstrating how the maps can be edited on ArcGIS Pro in the context of the watershed, and transferring the spatial data to ArcGIS Online so the layers could be used in ArcGIS StoryMaps. I also learned more about the formats for integrating map layers into ArcGIS StoryMaps in a consultation meeting with UConn's GIS Extension Educator Cary Chadwick.

As I reflect on this experience, I recognize how it aligns with my interests more than I initially imagined. I truly appreciate the opportunity to gain a foundation in climate adaptation and mitigation policy and planning on the municipal level in the fall course and now apply the knowledge in this practicum, during which I also learned about my classmates' various projects as they progressed. This has been one of the most impactful experiences during my time at UConn, and I cannot express enough gratitude for this program, its organizers Owen Placido and Renata Bertotti, and the community partners at the Alliance, Maggie Favretti and Z Grabowski

for their guidance on the project scope as well as Cam McClure and Watson Njoku for their support on the GIS side and Indigenous history included the StoryMap. As I created a resource for community members that translated environmental data and maps into an accessible format, this project helped me learn about climate adaptation efforts in watersheds and explore my interests in spatial storytelling. I am honored to have had the opportunity to work with the Alliance for the Mystic River Watershed through Climate Corps and am excited to see where this can grow in the future.