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Reflection: Community Climate Scavenger Hunts with the Alliance for the Mystic River Watershed (AMRW)

This semester, I worked on a climate adaptation project with the Alliance for the Mystic River Watershed (AMRW), which serves the communities of Stonington, Ledyard, North Stonington, and the Eastern and Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nations. While the process involved a variety of challenges, it also offered important opportunities for learning a growth.

My goal was to support AMRW's Climate Vulnerability Assessment by increasing community engagement and crowdsourcing climate data. This was executed through creating a Community Climate Scavenger Hunt, which was broken down into seasonality (Spring/Summer & Fall/Winter) and two different age groups (Fawn & Deer paths). The scavenger hunts are not only an engaging way for individuals to contribute to the CVA created by the Alliance, but also an educational resource as well. Additionally, I wanted to create space for community members to share environmental observations and ask questions while receiving expert input or feedback. The goal of completing these tasks is to create a more informed, prepared, and resilient community.

A key challenge was learning to use unfamiliar software tools like ArcGIS Survey123 and Quick Capture. Although I am a technical person, this did make me extremely nervous when approaching this project. However, with time and the help/support of others I was able to successfully learn how to use both Survey123 and Quick Capture. One of the more difficult aspects of the project involved coordinating with multiple stakeholders, each with their own schedules, priorities and communication styles. Aligning timelines between the AMRW, Fuss and O'Neill, and my own academic calendar required extreme flexibility. Communication delays and or technical issues caused shifts in the project timeline, which required quick adaptation to keep the project moving forward. Despite these hurdles, navigating these coordination challenges taught me the importance of proactive communication, contingency planning, and ultimately maintaining a solutions-focused mindset in collaborative environmental work.

The most rewarding part of this project was to see it all come together and ultimately realizing the positive impact my work could have on AMRW's community. Not only will the data collected through the Community Climate Scavenger Hunts contribute to meaningful climate action, but it will also foster curiosity and deeper learning about local level environmental change. Including safety resources—such as guidance on flood conditions or brush fire risks—added another layer of value, reinforcing the connection between environmental awareness and community well-being.

At the start of this semester, I hoped to bridge the gap between academic learning and hands-on environmental work. I wanted to contribute to something tangible, deepen my understanding of community-based climate adaptation, all while building skills in both technology and communication. This project exceeded these expectations. Not only did I learn to work with new tools like Quick Capture, but I also helped how this community engages with climate data collection while offering them education and safety resources. My career goals now feel more grounder, with a clearer sense of how I can make a difference through applied environmental science.