INTRO

Slide 1 welcome

Slide 2 title

Introduce myself

Hello! Thank you so much for taking time out of your busy Friday to come see my thesis defense, it means a lot. My name is Lily Seres and I'm a graduating Illustration major. I like to paint animals and plants and I think ecology is super cool!

Slide 3 statement

Abstract

This series of seven digitally collaged watercolor paintings, visually illustrates the stories of how Pacific Northwest keystone species interconnect with their ecosystems. The pieces include the Banana Slug & Coastal Redwood, Oregon White Oak & Acorn Woodpecker, Bufflehead & American Beaver & Scouler's Willow, Mountain Goat, American Badger, Chinook Salmon, and Northern Sea Otter & Bull Kelp. My intention is to draw the viewer in by portraying the beauty that nature has to offer. Each piece feels unique while all having the same bright, playful, and colorful energy. Just like a real ecosystem, there's always a detail you didn't notice the first time, causing the viewer to linger in each piece. The diverse group of animals and plants are accompanied by title cards briefly explaining each scene and how the keystone species benefits its ecosystem. My explanation then teaches the viewer about the interactions in each piece

leading to a further understanding and appreciation for the environments. The reason I made the series specific to the pnw was to create a greater connection with my local audience. My goal is to share this series and in turn inspire ecological awareness.

Slide 4 what's keystone spec

What is a keystone species

So, some of you might be wondering, What is a keystone species? Well, they are generally described as a species that other plants or animals in their ecosystem rely on. Without it, the ecosystem would severely fall out of balance. The keystone term comes from the keystone piece of an arch; without that stabilizing piece, the arch would fall. People generally only think of keystone species as animals, so I also featured plants in this project. A lot of the time, a plant or animal is considered to be a keystone species because it eats a lot or it gets eaten a lot. This is important to notice, but not so interesting to portray in this kind of project. That's why I chose to include species that are extremely influential or habitat builders.

Slide 5 context

CONTEXT

Slide 6 mommy and me

Brief background

I have always been creatively surrounded by plants and animals growing up. My dad is an arborist and landscaper and my mom has an eye for

design and beauty. They met in a flower shop where my mom was working and eventually owned their own for a while.

Slide 7 plant pics and animals kauai 1

We moved to Kaua'i when I was eleven so my sister and I could experience growing up in nature, similar to how my mom did on O'ahu. We eventually had a mini farm with a cat, dogs, chickens, goats, a pig, and a cow. After a few years of living there I became a moody teenager and wanted to do nothing but read.

Slide 8 high school art

Although I didn't know it at the time, I was subconsciously gaining a bigger connection with nature and portrayed it in my art. I was always drawing plants because that's what I knew, and for the longest time, I struggled with finding a deeper meaning in my art and wanted to find its purpose.

Slide 9 plant pics and animals kauai 2

While growing up with chickens and goats did create a bigger connection to animals, they were still our pets and not wild animals. They weren't living untouched in their natural habitat, they were in our field eating what we gave them. This connection was different from an endangered animal I had seen online or in a zoo once. All I knew was that this animal was on the brink of extinction because of human involvement. I was missing the story behind that animal, like their unique behavior, how they live in their environment, and the special feeling of interconnectedness.

I first met my partner when I started PNCA in 2021. His background in

environmental science and biology, and love for animals, broadened my knowledge about ecology. I learned about the amazing diversity, unification, and unique animal behavior! I then truly felt the impact of how human behavior has negatively impacted so many countless flora and fauna across so many ecosystems. For a long time, I felt helpless and overwhelmed, not knowing how to help without feeling like my actions weren't big enough. In high school, I tried to create environmental activist art, but it felt cliche and stale. Finally finding my special interest in ecology has opened the door for me.

MEANING

Slide 10 badger

Eco-art/education/shock value

My original plan was to include more focus on human impact in the final pieces but I ended up cutting that for time. My goal was to draw people in with the beauty of nature instead of using another technique like shock value. This would function to highlight negative human impact without making the viewer potentially feel dreadful. I struggle with some eco-art being too depressing and I get overwhelmed so I thought this would be a way to help that specific situation. Shock value can be a powerful asset in activist art, but using beauty and a colorful mood is the way I wanted to experiment with the subject matter. This would make more sense as an idea if I had more examples about failing ecosystems in the pieces but it still stands as the basis of the project. I hope that this approach attracts more people who wouldn't usually be interested in eco-art but would learn

to appreciate it upon finding out the meaning. As humans, we have a responsibility to respect the land we live on, and that includes the creatures and plant life that comes with it. I wanted to come up with ways that can reach new audiences so they can be inspired to feel more ecologically aware.

Slide 11 turkey tail

Smith and Bybee wetlands natural area

In preparation for the bufflehead piece, I had planned to go to Smith and Bybee wetlands natural area because that's the location I referenced that ecosystem from. I wanted to get to know the environment better and I could, since it was so close. I went one late Friday afternoon with my partner not expecting to see any animals let alone buffleheads but I ended up being blown away in surprise. Not only did we find multiple flocks of bufflehead but we saw nutria, a bunny, beavers and chewed stumps from beavers, mallards, eagles, and carps jumping from the water.

Slide 12 video

My favorite part was when I was on the bank trying to get a video of a carp jumping and I looked next to me and about a 100 feet away was a beaver minding his own business. I was so shocked as I watched it clean itself, watch the water for a minute, get up, walk into the water, and swim into the brush. Watching a beaver in its natural habitat completely undisturbed made me realize how powerful it is to witness these ecosystems firsthand. That moment reminded me that that was the reason behind my project.

Slide 13 beaver stump reflection

When you personally experience a place like that, it stops being abstract. You don't just hear that wetlands are important, you feel why they matter. Because of that experience, I now care more deeply about protecting that environment. My goal with this project is to create a similar sense of connection for others. By showing how ecosystems are interconnected with keystone species, animals, plants, and landscapes all relying on each other, I want people to understand not just that nature is important, but why. Most people would agree that we should "protect nature." But that idea can feel vague. For example, if someone asks you if you support "saving the beavers," you'd probably agree, but it doesn't necessarily stay with you. However, if you understand what that beaver does in its ecosystem, and especially if you've seen a beaver in a place you care about, that connection becomes personal.

When people feel personally connected to an ecosystem, they're more likely to care about what happens to it. So when a local wetland is threatened, it's no longer just "land." It's a place they value and want to protect.

This project is meant to help people see the complexity and beauty of ecosystems in their own surroundings, so that awareness can turn into care, and care can turn into action.

Slide 14 influences

INFLUENCES

Slide 15 scientific illustrations

Scientific illustrations

I've had an appreciation towards scientific illustrations since high school. I always appreciate how accurate the forms are and often find myself looking them up if I need more clarification of how a specific species looks. The other thing that interests me is the layout and how each asset is arranged on the page to create a balanced image. I also love that everything is hand painted, showing the craftsmanship that went into it.

Slide 16 collage

My long love for collage

I have always loved collage and the crafty feeling it would give me piecing together random clips of paper or miscellaneous items. I find it a lot more relaxing than sketching because I don't fixate on whether the figure I'm drawing is ugly or not. I cut out existing assets and experiment with the composition before glueing them down to solidify their arrangement. When my panel at my proposal brought up doing a sort of collage process I got really excited and inspired. I think it's easier for me to experiment and piece together assets to create a composition rather than coming up with a loose sketch of what it might look like as the first step. When I had been ideating the project before this conversation, I had already been attracted to the collage aesthetic to portray all the different assets that I wanted to include in each piece in a dynamic way.

Slide 18 Teagan white

Miyuta Komachi

Miyuta Komachi is a Japanese ink and watercolor illustrator who paints animals and plants. In the majority of her works, there are little characters that interact with the environment and subject matter, which adds a playful mood. I really love how Komachi allows the watercolor pigment to have a life of its own while also confining it in delicate and realistic forms.

Slide 18 Teagan white

Teagan White

Teagan White is a Pacific Northwest-based artist who depicts ecological issues by featuring animals and plants in their paintings. White has a deeply poetic view and aims to create awareness by creating a connection with the viewer and the subjects. Their pieces are realistic in form but have lots of illustrative elements that I'm inspired by. White's work doesn't immediately look like it's meant to represent awareness, but when you look closer, you can see subtle symbols like some of the animal's eyes missing or subjects disintegrating. Subtle representation like that is something I really wanted my project to achieve.

Slide 19 Collin varner

Collin Varner

All but one keystone species was inspired from the books titled, *50 Keystone Flora Species of the Pacific Northwest* and *50 Keystone Fauna Species of the Pacific Northwest* by Collin Varner. These pocket guides were the perfect amount of information I needed to look through each example and decide which species I wanted to portray. Collin Varner is a horticulturalist and arboriculturalist and worked at the University of British

Columbia's Botanical Garden for 40 years. These books helped me a lot with getting my ideas quickly off the ground.

Slide 20 the final pieces

EXPLANATION OF PIECES

The Keystone Species

I aimed to find a wide variety of species that all had their own unique characteristics and impacts. Each piece is an ecosystem based off of a real location that you can go to and have a good chance of finding everything included. There are specific things that I have illustrated in each piece that tells a story about how the keystone species functions within its ecosystem. I will now go over each piece and talk about each keystone species.

Slide 21 banana

Pacific Banana Slug & Coastal Redwood

Located: Redwood National and State Parks, Orick, California

Coastal Redwood

- The trees suck up moisture from fog through the leaves and bark, this process is pertinent during dry and hot summers.
- High up in the canopies, they have their own mini ecosystem. The wandering salamander is a species that lives up there. The fern mat canopies on old growth trees produced their own soil replicating the forest floor.
- This species holds the title of tallest tree in the world. Hyperion, being just over 380 ft tall and around 600 to 800 years old, is found in this very ecosystem.

- These trees are great carbon traps. Since they can live more than 2,000 years and take centuries to decompose when they die, they keep the carbon trapped for a very long time. Old growth redwood forests store 3 to 10 times more carbon than any forest on earth.
- Fallen logs can turn into nurse logs that other organisms inhabit.
- Because of extensive logging in the 1850's due to the gold rush, this left only a remaining fraction of old growth trees to survive.

Pacific Banana slug

- These slugs are generalist feeders but are also detritivores, which means they feed on decomposing material like animal poop, plant material, animal carcasses, and mushrooms.
- Their excrement is nitrogen rich which is good fertilizer for the soil.
- They carry seeds and spores around the forest which help with spreading new plant growth.
- Lots of animals love to eat them like snakes, raccoons, millipedes, crows, beetles, and ducks.
- Though they are tiny compared to redwood, they are the largest land slug in North America and second largest in the world.

Other species included:

- Stellar's Jay
- Wandering Salamander
- Roosevelt Elk
- Common Garter Snake
- Northern Red Belt
- Western Sword Fern
- Turkey Tail
- Redwood sorrel

Illustrated benefits:

- I portrayed the coastal Redwoods' canopy ecosystems and its fern mats. I also showed how the trees make up a whole forest habitat for other

animals to live in. I included how they can also be a nurse log, with turkey tails growing on them.

- I show a Pacific banana slug eating decomposing material like animal feces. Their excrement is healthy for soil, so I have little sprouts growing from the ground where it lays. They are also food for animals and one is getting preyed on by a wandering salamander and stellar's jay.

Slide 22 oak acorn

Oregon White Oak & Acorn Woodpecker

Located: Mount Tzouhalem Ecological Reserve, North Cowichan, British Columbia

Oregon White Oak

- This oak supports thousands of species.
- They are tolerant to occasional fire, flooding, and droughts.
- Oregon white oak used to be everywhere in the Willamette valley prairies but has been a declining and very rare ecosystem for a while now because of the lack of controlled burns and mostly because of human development. Because these trees and ecosystems are less common now, some wildflower and bird species have suffered the same rarity.

Acorn Woodpecker

- These birds are habitat builders. They carve out holes in trees for nesting and only use them for one breeding season. After they move out, other birds move in and claim the home.
- When moving their acorns, they tend to drop onto the ground, causing new tree growth which benefits the oak ecosystems.
- They have a special behaviour of drilling holes in trees and storing their acorns in the holes. These trees are dedicated to be storage trees and can be used for decades by a single breeding group.

Other species included:

- Cooper's Hawk

- Band-tailed Pigeon
- Northwestern Garter Snake
- Chocolate Lily
- Western Buttercup
- Small Camas
- Methuselah's Beard Lichen

Illustrated benefits:

- On the left, the Oregon White Oak is used as a storage tree for the woodpecker's acorns. The center oak is called home to three different types of birds. Three different types of wildflower, some endangered, crowd around the tree thriving from the sunlight and soil quality.
- Acorn Woodpecker has made a hole in the main tree for nesting and a new family of birds has moved in.

Slide 23 wetland

Bufflehead & American Beaver & Scouler's Willow

Located: Smith and Bybee Wetlands Natural Area, Portland, Oregon

Bufflehead

- Like all ducks, they disperse seeds, cuttings, and even small organisms from pond to pond which improves biodiversity.
- Instead of bobbing for food, buffleheads dive to the bottom in shallow water and eat aquatic invertebrates, mollusks, and crustaceans.
- They are the smallest diving duck in North America and winter in Oregon from around October to April.

American Beaver

- Beavers are not only habitat builders but ecosystem builders. When they build their dams out of mud and sticks, they flood the surrounding area creating nutrient rich beaver ponds. They create these environments so they can build their beaver lodges to be protected from predators and

store their food for winter. Not only does this benefit themselves, but they attract all kinds of wetland species because of this behavior.

- A cool animal behavior trait they do is slap their tails against the water to signal as a warning sign for other beavers that predators are near.
- American beavers were almost brought to extinction thanks to the greedy and colonizing North American fur trade. As of 2024, Oregon now requires permits to kill beavers, encouraging non-lethal management like relocating over killing when they damage property.

Scouler's Willow

- These willows bloom early in the season which make them a vital food source for moths, butterflies, mason bees, and honeybees as well as a larval host to 18 different moths and butterflies.
- They have deep root systems that thrive in riparian landscapes and help control soil erosion.
- Scouler's willow is a browse for many animals including american beavers. The branches are also used by beavers to build their lodges.
- They are considered to be pioneer species and sprout up quickly in barren or damaged environments.

Other species included:

- Quaking Aspen
- Broadleaf Cattail
- Water Fern
- Pacific Chorus Frog
- Painted Turtle
- Spotted Spreadwing

Illustrated benefits:

- Bufflehead are shown dropping seeds and nutrient rich feces into a different pond, starting new plant growth.
- American Beaver are portrayed building their den and dam which has created this lush beaver pond ecosystem attracting a variety of species.

Their tail pattern reflects on the pond water to illustrate that they created this environment.

- Scouler's Willow is used as food and building resources for the beavers. Its roots are shown intertwining with the pond's bank to illustrate that it holds the bank together, preventing erosion.

Slide 24 goat

Mountain Goat

Located: Sunrise (mount rainier), Washington

Mountain Goat

- Mountain goats graze in high altitude alpine meadows and surrounding forests eating mainly grasses, sedges, wildflowers and other plants.
- They create fire breaks between forests by grazing on taller woody plants that encroach on meadows.
- They disperse a diverse mix of plants from alpine meadows down to low-level avalanche tracks.
- Sadly, their population is declining in the North Cascade region. Scientists theorize that climate change is the problem. There are too many hot summers and wet winters which decreases vegetation growth, stresses the animals, and decreases mating.

Other species included:

- Bald eagle
- Black bear
- Showy sedge
- Alaska Yellow Cedar
- Fireweed
- Yellow Map Lichen
- Subalpine fir

Illustrated benefits:

- The Mountain Goats are portrayed grazing up in elevation in the alpine meadow, spreading the vegetation into new areas. The fireweed represents the firebreaks they create by grazing.

Slide 25 badger

American Badger

Located: Steens Mountain Wilderness, Diamond, OR

American Badger

- American badgers are habitat creators by digging burrows. They use these for their dwellings, pursue prey, and can be later used by other animals.
- Using their powerful front legs and long claws, they aerate soil, promoting healthy and nutrient rich grasslands.
- They have been found hunting with coyotes even though they are predator and prey. Each animal will hunt the same animal together, scaring it out of the burrow, increasing the prey's vulnerability.
- American badgers are not protected in Oregon and there are no laws against killing them, although in British Columbia, there are current conservation projects to help them since they are considered endangered there. They mainly suffer from habitat loss by human developments.

Other species included:

- Coyote
- Greater Sage-Grouse
- Red-tailed hawk
- Northern Pocket Gopher
- Big Sagebrush
- Cushion Buckwheat
- Peck's Thistle

Illustrated benefits:

- American Badger is shown aerating the soil, hunting with the coyote, and creating a habitat for the northern pocket gopher with its burrows. The burrow lines let your eye flow through the piece showing how the badger's behavior interconnects the ecosystem.

Slide 26 salmon

Chinook Salmon

Located: Bonneville Fish Hatchery, Cascade Locks in Oregon, Columbia river, Snake river

In North America, they range from the Monterey Bay area of California to the Chukchi Sea area of Alaska.

Chinook Salmon

- Chinook Salmon are extremely important species because of the vast variety of ecosystems they benefit through their great migration.
- One thing that stands them apart from other salmon sub-species is that when they live in the ocean, they are the main food source for the southern resident orcas, who face extinction and without them, they would be heavily jeopardized.
- When salmon migrate up and down stream, they are prey to bears, eagles, river otters, wolves, and birds. Their decomposing carcasses are spread through the forests during this process which provides nutrients to plants and trees.
- As most people know, salmon are threatened due to habitat loss from dam construction which blocks them from returning upstream to complete their life cycle. Climate change, overfishing, and water quality are other factors that also contribute to the decline of their population.

Other species included:

- Bald eagle
- Black bear
- Southern resident orcas

- Bull Kelp

Illustrated benefits:

- Chinook Salmon are shown feeding southern resident orcas in the ocean as well as black bears and bald eagles through their life going up and down stream. Carcass droppings from the bear give nutrients to the forest vegetation and promote new growth. Their pattern that lays across their spine flows through the bottom of the piece. The bull kelp frond represents the journey from the ocean to the river.

Slide 27 otter

Northern Sea Otter & Bull Kelp

Located: Sitka, Alaska

Northern Sea Otter and **Bull Kelp**

- One of the most well known examples of a keystone species is the sea otter. The ones that are usually portrayed are southern sea otters that reside in the California area. I decided to show off its bigger cousin, the northern sea otter.
- These otters suffered the same treatment as the American beavers during the fur trade because of its similar dense fur. They were also hunted to near extinction.
- This caused devastation in west coast ocean ecosystems. The sea otter's diet mainly consists of sea urchins and because they weren't being eaten anymore, they boomed in population causing the sea urchins to eat and eradicate the kelp forests. Thousands of species lost their food source, habitat, and shelter. Sea otters will always be a good example of how impactful and interconnected keystone species are in their ecosystems because of the very real consequences it had. A worldwide ban of hunting sea otters and conservation efforts helped bring back the population and its ecosystem from the brink of extinction.

Other species included:

- Sunflower sea star
- Arctic green sea urchin
- Pinto abalone
- Modest clown dorid
- Stellar sea Lion
- Red sea urchin
- Kelp greenling

Illustrated benefits:

- Bull Kelp is shown providing habitat to the kelp greenling and other fish. One bull kelp in the center of the piece has sea urchins overlaid its silhouette to resemble the urchin's impact on the kelp. On the water's surface, the otters use the kelp to help anchor themselves when they eat.
- There is a Northern Sea Otter near the bottom of the piece plucking a sea urchin from a silhouette of a pile of them. This represents how sea otters keep the sea urchin population in check.

Slide 28 process

PROCESS

Slide 29 inat

Process of finding each environment and INaturalist/reference pics

The beginning of this process was heavily research based and oh man did I get way too sucked into the details. Without the website iNaturalist, I don't think this project would be as accurate as it is. If you aren't aware, this website functions as an "online social network" of people sharing their observations of species all across the world to identify them. Anyone can post an image of a plant or animal with the location, date or even sound

that they have found. They can suggest an identification and other people will make suggestions based on the given information. The specific parts that I benefited from the most were the amazing photography and ability to make a selection of a specific location and see which organisms have been identified in that area.

All of my reference photos were found from iNaturalist because I knew what I was looking at was the correct subspecies. There's a filter for images to only see identifications with a "research grade" tag. This ensures that several people have decided on the ID and that a lot of information was given by the poster so it could be accurate. My goal for reference pictures was to have at least three for the keystone species and at least one, showing off a behavior that benefits the environment. I would then pick the other animals and plants that benefit from it or are their predators and prey. The ability to box around a specific location and see what has been identified there proved to be extremely helpful because I wanted each species I portrayed to be able to be traced back to a specific location.

Slide 30 color

Color

To come up with color palettes, there was a lot of time that went into it. I first created a photo collage of my references for each piece and then eye dropped the most common ones I saw. I wasn't sure where to go from there because they all kind of looked the same and didn't have that much variety. From the start of the project, I knew I wanted an exaggerated color palette that would have a bright and playful theme. I aimed to have about 5-7 different colors that would be inspired by the original environment, just with

more saturated colors and at least one pop out or complimentary color for accents. These swatches proved to be helpful to have throughout the whole process. I used them as a base reference when I needed help picking colors for paint mixing, choosing colored pencils, and color correcting.
Another way I used color was to use all the colors in the palette for the keystone species and everything else would just have a couple. This was to emphasize the importance of the keystone in its role and to make your eye be drawn to it first in the piece.
I am really proud of the colors in this series and they were surprisingly exactly what I was picturing for this project.

Slide 31 banana

Explanation of the amount of paintings vs pieces (plants and animals)

I’m sure you’ve noticed that there are more asset paintings than pieces on the wall and I want to talk about why. I had a lot of assets I wanted to make and I didn’t want to make them too small by trying to fit them all on one page because I wouldn’t be able to resize in photoshop. To make it easier, I separated the animals and plants into two different paintings. The plants also include some extra environment assets like rocks, grass, moss, and bodies of water that I could use to shape the environment.

Slide 32 sketching

Sketching

Once the hotpress watercolor paper was cut to size, I picked out my water color pencils based off my swatch and taped the back of the paper to my cutting mat so it was flat. I used my reference images to sketch the assets and tried to get a very accurate form. This part was important to me since I was going to make the colors exaggerated. This way, the species would still be recognizable.

Slide 33 salt

Painting

The painting process always started with mixing my paint. The way that ended up working best for me was mixing a big batch of each color in my well palette so I wouldn't have to worry about running out. I used some granulating watercolors, eye dropping rubbing alcohol, and salt to add more texture. By far, my most used painting technique was wet on wet. This allowed the pigment to fluidly blend together so there weren't any harsh lines. The painting acted as the base form for the object so I intentionally wouldn't make it look fully finished, because that's what the drawing was for.

Slide 34 drawing

Drawing

Once the paintings were dry, I would start drawing on the painting I finished most recently. This way, I would give each painting the same amount of energy and time. Alternating like this helped a lot with unintentionally spending a lot of creative energy on one and then not having the same amount of energy to spend on the other. I used color pencils to enhance

features like faces, line work, shading, highlighting, and outlining shapes. The aquarell crayons were mainly used used for chunky and funky lines and squiggles. This process was important because it added contrasting texture as well as refinement.

Slide 35 computer

Scanning/color correcting

After the drawing part was done, the asset painting was now complete. At this point, I was officially done with sitting at my table and it was time to migrate two steps over to my desk. It was time to scan and prepare the paintings in photoshop for isolation.

Slide 36 scan

Since the scanner wasn't big enough to do each painting in one pass, I had to scan each side and then overlay them together. After the painting was stitched together, I would then color correct to get it to what the painting actually looked like. I did this whole process in CMYK so I knew the colors I used would be the same when it came time to print.
I used levels to make the background more white and have less texture and spot healed cat hair and light streaks from the scanner out of the assets. Then it was time to move on to my least favorite part of the project. Isolating….

Slide 37 goat

Isolating

Isolating each asset was pertinent so I could arrange them in any way I wanted in the collage process. To be frank, it took me a frustratingly long amount of time because I used colored pencils to outline everything. This made a small texture gradient around each piece and would get cut off in sharp lines if I tried using the magic wand tool. It would just look weird and not look like the original asset. So I began this process in the beginning by selecting the main image with the quick selection tool and then going in with the polygon lasso tool to basically add in and subtract everything that the quick selection tool didn't pick up. This made me absolutely hate the process the first time because unsurprisingly it took me all day to just do one asset painting. I felt like each time I did the isolating step, I was trying a new technique so I could find the easiest way to make an accurate selection of all the desired pixels. At one point, I was turning the image black and white, using color select to pick the color of the pixels I wanted, and then going in after that to add things back and erase excess white areas around the asset. Long story short, the last four pieces were isolated using the magic wand tool because it magically started working correctly. I feel like I know the ins and outs of photoshop now with the amount of experimenting I did, which is convenient timing since I won't have access to it anymore after I graduate in less than a month. Anyways. Once all assets were isolated, I could then move on to the actual collage and arranging step.

Slide 38 wips

Arranging

This part was one of my favorites because all I had to worry about was making the composition feel right. All of the assets were done, all I had to do was put it together. I had a loose composition for all of them in my head so I had a basic understanding of which ones would be horizontal and which would be vertical. In my mind, it made sense that the northern sea otter and bull kelp, mountain goat, and pacific banana slug and coastal redwood would be vertical. All of these pieces either have really tall keystone species like bull kelp or redwood or they have a steep environment like the mountain goat. The rest would benefit from having a long horizontal ratio. For landscape assets, I would copy and paste, change colors, size, rotate, and flip the original asset so I could make it feel like there were more than there were. I added additional line drawings on top once the composition was set so I could enhance the flow or add patterns inspired by the keystone's visual traits. For a lot of the pieces, I added gradients to help stabilize the piece as well as help your eye flow through it. I also added watercolor paper texture back into it so I didn't feel so flat. I really enjoyed this process and thought the ability to change whatever I wanted with no consequences was really freeing and reduced stress.

Slide 39 everything

After this step, everything was complete.

Slide 40 old

Things that changed

I decided to shift from fully analog paintings for the final images to be digitally collaged assets that were made from analog paintings. This was a

new process that was initially slow to learn but became more intuitive over time. Since the finals would be printed, I decided to scale up the images from the planned 12x6 to 24x12. Though this new method extended my timeline, it allowed for more flexibility and creative freedom. When I was working on the American badger and Chinook salmon, I quickly realized my timeline was unrealistic as the digital process took much longer than expected. After completing a few pieces and experimenting with combining the bufflehead piece with the american beaver and scouler's willow piece, I became overwhelmed by both time constraints and the amount of content I wanted to include. My original vision to depict the entire ecosystem, history, and human impacts within each piece proved too ambitious for the three-month timeframe, and I ultimately decided to cut out human impact and reduce the series from ten pieces to seven. In the end, this let me have more time for other pieces and if I would have forced myself to do the two others, my paintings would not be at the standard I would be happy with like how they are today.

Slide 41 takeaways

AFTER GRADUATION

Career outcomes/ and what i want to do after school, how does this relate?

After I graduate, I want to explore creating products. I would love to go into stationary, licensing, cover art, tabling, and maybe illustrative gallery work. I have always liked the idea of selling a variety of products like stickers, mini and large prints, gift packaging, etc. I would like to keep exploring this theme of conservation, plants and animals, and environmental awareness.

Although I’m proud of my serious art, I like making silly things too, and I think it would be possible for my art to live in both spaces separately or possibly even together.
I can see the prints being displayed in a gallery or turned into a poster for awareness of the species and ecosystems to connect people like I intended them to.
I want to use the 259 assets that I’ve made and experiment with making products out of them. Since I would have pre-existing art, I could fully focus on figuring out how to take an asset and turn it into a fun product that someone would want to buy like a notepad, cards, a new print, pattern on a textile, etc. I’ve already made stickers and a postcard relating to this project and I’m happy with how they came out.

Slide 42 rando pics

CONCLUSION

Emotionally wrapping up

This project encompasses four months of consistent hard work and dedication. I have never worked on a project this big before and I have learned a lot about myself through this process. Sleepless nights and overwhelming stress combined with the feeling of being truly proud of myself and my work is something I’ve never experienced on this level. I know that my thesis most likely won’t be relevant to my career or portfolio in five years and that I will have equally hard or harder projects, but this is a stepping stone that I am proud to say I’ve accomplished.

Thank People

Thank you to my mentor, Colete Martin, for always encouraging me to push myself and giving me the validation I needed. Thank you to my friends who gave me advice and feedback, as well as helping me feel like I wasn't alone in this process. Thank you to my parents and everything you did to help me obtain a very expensive piece of paper hehe. Jokes aside, I wouldn't be here giving this presentation if it weren't for you guys. Thank you to my sister, Emma, who always hypes me up and makes me feel like whatever I'm doing at the moment is important. And thank you to my partner, Siraj, who not only helped me with the science of this project, but was everything I needed and more during these past few months. I love you all and thank you for being a wonderful support system. Thank you to everyone who showed up too, I'm so glad I got to share my ideas with you and I hope they sparked at least a little bit of a connection.

Slide 43 seals

Comment on postcards and stickers and links

Before I finish, I want to mention that I have researched and collected a list of conservation groups and resources for all of the Keystone species, so if you would like to learn more about how you can help or want to know more in depth information about the species, there's a QR code on the table that will take you to them.

There's also another cool QR code that will take you to a google maps collection of the locations that each piece is referenced from so you can see their physical locations.

I also have the keystone species books, scientific illustration book, and my thesis journal if you want to look through them.

The mini ecosystem terrarium thing has real wood shavings from the beaver I found at Smith and Bybee if you want to look at them.

And feel free to take stickers and a postcard!

Click slide for thank you

Thank you!