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West Haven High School Students Document Shoreline Restoration Project Through UCONN's Eco-Digital Storytellers Program

WEST HAVEN – Fourteen West Haven High School digital media students have been selected to participate in the University of Connecticut's (UConn) [Eco-Digital Storytellers program](#). They will focus their project on West Haven's [Shoreline Resilience and Eco-Restoration Project](#).

"This partnership is a win for my students on so many levels," said West Haven High School digital media and journalism teacher Jennifer Cummings. "They are getting hands-on experience with UConn's natural resources, digital media, and extension departments while helping to publicize an important environmental project that is close to home."

Through the Eco-Digital Storytellers program, which is backed by a \$1.35 million grant from the National Science Foundation, UConn is providing funding and technical support to select Connecticut high school students so they can create community-focused digital-media environmental-action projects.

"We're really thinking about narrative structures as a way for people to express their identities and their thoughts and actions about environmental issues and then using technology to support those narratives," said Anna Lindemann, UConn Associate Professor of Motion Design and Animation and one of the lead faculty members associated with the project. "Empowering college students to be mentors who will then inspire high school students is one of the really exciting and novel parts of this project."

The West Haven Shoreline Resilience and Eco-Restoration Project will restore 1.5 acres of public shoreline to native coastal plant and dune habitat and enhance public access to environmental education and passive recreation in a highly trafficked stretch of the shoreline across from Old Grove Park.

"We feel very fortunate that the students have chosen to focus their project on the Shoreline Restoration project because their work will help us to build awareness for it while helping to make a difference in their community," said Shoreline Restoration co-leads Mark Paine, Director of Parks and Recreation for the City of West Haven, and Marilyn Wilkes, Vice President of the Land Trust of West Haven.

West Haven High School students are collaborating with the Shoreline Restoration Committee and a multidisciplinary UConn team of seven professors and two undergraduate

students to create a series of videos about the West Haven shoreline restoration project. They hope their videos will bring more attention, support, and funding to the Shoreline Restoration project.

"The first time I heard about the Shoreline Restoration project was in my digital media and journalism class," said Agatha Lima-Freitas, a senior at West Haven High School who is involved in the partnership. "I feel connected to the project because it's so close to the school. I adore journalism and I also participate in the gardening club at my school. Those three things come together for this project. I also joined this project because I have little brothers, and I would love to take a walk with them near the beach in a beautiful and clean environment. I want them to have a special place in our town."

Over the course of the school year, the UConn team will teach the students how to engage in environmental storytelling, using geospatial technology and digital media tools as vessels to convey their messages. They will be taught how to use a mapping application, called ArcGIS StoryMaps, to create interactive online narratives using maps and digital media. Students will also learn basic digital media and design skills, such as video and animation, to share engaging stories about the project.

"With this project, we can help West Haven students with an environmental project that they're passionate about and that will help to improve their community," said UConn students Emma Dutil and Avi Obie, both Eco-Digital Storyteller Mentors for the program. "We are excited to be working with them and can't wait to see their final product!"

The students will showcase their digital projects at a professional event hosted by the Connecticut Science Center in May 2024.

Photo Credit: Shacqwan Kingston, a West Haven High School student in the Eco-Digital Storytellers Program

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