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Plastic waters, plastic land. Pandemic pollution Terre de plastique, mers de plastique. Pandémie et pollution

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The world is tragically awash in discarded masks. I learned that that “75 per cent of the used masks, as well as other pandemic-related waste, will end up in landfills, or floating in the seas.”¹ I love being outside, and from a young age have been enamored by different environments and the plants and animals they shelter. My favorite activities are made possible by the natural wonders of the world that I am blessed to live near/travel and to: fly-fishing in the Bow River, snorkelling in Thailand, and hiking the Rocky Mountain’s to name only a few! All my activities have the potential to be disrupted and poisoned due to the mass production of unrecyclable, non-biodegradable, single-use masks and more importantly the misuse and improper disposal of them. Production of plastic products was already a threat prior to COVID-19, and with people recklessly disposing of their masks the health of the environment is now in potential jeopardy.

The poster image I created represents the very real possibility of the beautiful ecosystems that mean so much to me becoming damaged by pollution. My poster is made of masks I collected (after being inspired by this assignment) from working as a receptionist at a physiotherapy clinic over the course of two months where I must use a single-use mask provided to me. Each time I walk around Saskatoon, I see masks everywhere. The notion of masks ending up in and damaging the ecosystems that I love is exasperating as it is yet another one of the effects of COVID-19 that is beyond my control. I keep my social circle small and wash my hands, however I cannot prevent other people’s masks from entering the natural environments that I love.

Masks are an essential item in the struggle with COVID-19, however the criteria for who should be wearing a medical mask vs. a fabric mask should be better explained to reduce the environmental impact, ensure proper disposal of used masks, and always ensure there are enough medical masks available to those who need it. My collage is one way to educate a young or old audience on this issue. While we are fighting so hard to keep ourselves safe from COVID-19, we must also work hard to keep planet earth safe too.

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