



## Staff Profile:

### Marin Chambers

Research Associate

**“I do so many strange and interesting things.”**

#### Marin’s Story

One of Marin’s strategies throughout her life has been asking a lot of great questions, and her curiosity sent her all over the world for a decade. While traveling in Peru, she became fascinated by food and agriculture issues in Latin America. She travelled, worked on farms, contributed to conservation projects, and taught English and Spanish. Through these work experiences, Marin became interested in horticultural science and came to CSU for the Organic Agriculture Interdisciplinary Program. Rather than taking a tempting path towards viticulture, Marin returned to Guatemala for undergraduate research surrounding farming issues. This was the beginning of Marin’s deep interest in research.

Returning home to Colorado, Marin continued her work on farms with the intention of becoming a farmer herself. However, she found herself more and more interested in the dynamics of the weeds and native plants that surrounded the fields. As she asked questions of the farmers around her about what it really meant to be the one predicting the market dynamics of the public’s desire for purple carrots one year and rainbow carrots the next, she found out about the important dynamics outside the farm’s boundaries that impact food production.

A lot of the answers to Marin’s big questions focused on water. Farmers were deeply concerned with water quality and quantity, the socioeconomics of water, and water rights. Marin wanted more experience and knowledge about the ecological issues surrounding water, so she started hanging around the Warner College of Natural Resources. “I was knocking on people’s doors, I was cold calling professors, and that’s how I learned about the opportunity to intern with the Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP).”

During an internship with CNHP, Marin gained botany experience by performing plant identification surveys all over Colorado in wetlands, range environments, and forests. Marin’s botany skills served her well as she was hired by the Rocky Mountain Research Station to do research in Wyoming’s Snowy Range. While Marin was hired as a field

## Marin in a Nutshell

**Best part of the job:** Getting to see so many wonderful, passionate, smart people dedicating themselves to doing great work for our forests and watersheds.

**Most challenging part of the job:** Not feeling like there’s enough time to stay up-to-date with all of the scientific literature.

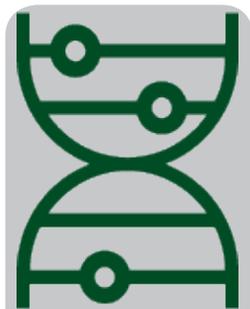
**Best field snack:** Homemade Chex Mix, of course. Marin made sure to clarify—“an ok second is Cheeze-its. You know, a post-day snack in the car on the way home...” The best lunch is Thai curry.

**Favorite plant:**

“The one that every time I see it I shriek is the *Eritrichium nanum*. The alpine forget-me-not. It’s the cutest thing. It’s so beautiful, and they tend to be very deeply rooted and incredibly old. It’s just amazing, you see this little plant and it only really gets to grow two months at a time and it’ll be between 200 and 800 years old. Amazing.”



Apollonio Tottoli  
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**“Research is really just asking complex questions and finding ways to answer them”**

technician, a confluence of circumstances and her previous botany experience snagged her the job of the project's botanist; Marin enjoyed the challenge of learning all the plants for all the areas of that ecosystem in a single summer (budding botanists will recognize this as a mighty feat).

Monitoring in the Snowy Range furthered Marin's interest in research and botany, and also inspired continued thinking about water issues—particularly about how water is tied to forests. On Colorado's Front Range, work in forests often means confronting the reality of fire. As a result, Marin got the opportunity to do 10-year post-fire botanical monitoring in the Hayman Fire burn area. "It blew my mind," she says, "the vastness of the high-severity burn areas."

Because Marin spent her days looking closely at the ground, she began to think more about the seedling regeneration that was happening alongside the growth of grasses and forbs. Questions about this regeneration inspired Marin's master's work on tree regeneration ([Patterns of conifer regeneration following high severity wildfire in ponderosa pine-dominated forests of the Colorado Front Range](#)), work that she continues today at CFRI. However, she doesn't necessarily think of herself as a scientist because she doesn't "feel connected enough to the scientific literature. I am contributing to science and scientific understanding, but I have this very black and white view of it where, 'if you're not publishing a paper on it it's not science.'" She contributes to the scientific endeavor by doing project management, serving as a monitoring and science advisor, expert, and translator, and working with partners to revamp and improve their monitoring and adaptive management programs.

As Marin continues to be a witness to and participant in collaborative processes, she sees that people working together can have an impact on the landscape. Marin enjoys the real, tangible results that a bridging organization like CFRI can have in convening and supporting those collaborative groups. Moreover, she never sees her work becoming boring. There are lots of challenging questions that remain for Marin to ask and seek answers to, and she concludes, "I feel optimistic, largely because of the people I work with."

### Field Stories with Marin

*I have a lot of exciting stories that have to do with being shot at on the Pike National Forest. The Pike Forest has an issue with recreational and illegal shooting. And a lot of these high severity burn areas where I was working can be viewed by the public as being trashed, with the assumption that nobody else was recreating in them. So one day, we had parked our Forest Service vehicle in a very obvious place, and we were collecting some data in a high severity burn area. All of a sudden, I hear shots literally zooming right over my head, and my field tech and I just dropped. We're lying on our bellies, crawling on our elbows through this high-severity burn area where there are no trees, and had to crawl around this huge berm to get back to our vehicle. We came around the berm, and we see that the shooters were parked right next to us, so they knew someone was doing something in the area. Keep in mind, we're wearing bright orange vests and red backpacks, so I have no idea how they didn't see us out there. When I came up behind them to let them know that we had almost been shot, the guy just said, "Oh, sorry, I wasn't wearing my glasses."*



### What Marin Wishes Everyone Knew about Forest Science:

**All of this is so complex.**

*The ecosystems themselves have multiple layers and levels of complexity. And then all the people who care about and work in those ecosystems bring their own ideas and values to the table. Policy and economics can influence another level of complexity. With climate change, it's only getting more complex. We're hurtling towards a future that's uncertain for all of us, and that's fascinating, challenging, and exciting.*



Marin enjoys spending time with family, including her young son.