

ECOLOGY GENOMICS OF THE AMERICAN PIKA
Field Research Assistant II
Montana State University

Location: Sangre de Cristo Mountains (CO) and San Juan Mountains (CO)

Goal: To give you experience in the pursuit of high-intensity field research of alpine small mammals and conservation.

General explanation of the project: The American Pika (*Ochotona princeps*) is a keystone species in alpine-montane ecosystems. Importantly, American pikas comprise multiple distinct lineages that likely separated from one another during the Pleistocene, raising the possibility that the species will respond differently to climatic changes across its range. Our research asks how climate and landscape features have shaped genetic variation and patterns of gene expression at the southernmost limit of *O. princeps*' range. Specifically, we aim to describe patterns of genetic variation and population history in pika populations in and around the San Juan and Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

Position Description: You will work as a team member, trapping and aiding in the sample collection of American pikas (*Ochotona princeps*). The position-specific duties will include working in remote mountain environments (to elevations above 12,000 feet), identifying signs of pika presence across unstable talus, navigation by topographic maps (GPS unit when cloud cover allows), positioning live-traps on potentially unstable talus, recording precise data in an organized and efficient manner in a fast paced environment, and care/maintenance of field equipment. We may experience extreme weather while out in the field, and awareness/mindfulness/safe decision-making is required at all times. Physical and mental endurance while working and temporarily living in this rough terrain is expected.

Desirable qualifications

- Experience in the collection of field data, and trapping small mammals
- CPR and Wilderness first aid training, a safety-oriented mindset, and good decision-making
- Interest in ecology, wildlife, and their relationship to scientific research
- Critical-thinking skills, attention to detail, and a positive attitude

Physical Demands:

Field sites for this project are in remote areas of the southern Rocky Mountains. Required activities will include hiking and backpacking at high altitudes over rough, uneven, rocky mountainous terrain. Lifting and carrying a backpack of up to 40 pounds of field and personal supplies. Hiking up to 15 miles per day for up to 5 days straight, and overnight tent camping for up to 10 days at a time. Early mornings and long days will be common, and potentially two days off per week.

Working Environment:

- As part of the research team, we expect you to be punctual, responsible, hard-working, careful, and ready to ask questions if you are unsure of what you should be doing or why you are doing it.
- We expect you to work hard at acquiring the necessary skills (e.g., pika presence identification, trap setting, and sample collection methods) to work quickly and efficiently.
- We expect the field crew to use project vehicles (owned or rented by Montana State University) with care and drive courteously for designated drivers. If vehicles are used for personal trips (e.g., to the grocery store), the

field crew should pay for their own gas and are responsible for any damage incurred while using the vehicle on personal time.

Start and End date:

- The start date will be in early to mid-June 2026. Exact dates will be determined by May 1st, 2026. The end date will be late July – early August. The end date depends on the results and the progression of summer fieldwork.

Logistics:

- You will be paid \$16.34/hour by Montana State University for up to 40 hours/week.
- Health insurance is not provided.
- Holidays are determined by the Montana State University calendar.
- When at base camp, water, power, and access to showers

How to Apply: Interested candidates should send a cover letter, curriculum vitae/ resume, and a list of three references (names, email addresses, and phone numbers) who can attest to your qualifications relative to the position's duties and demands to Lizzy Osterhoudt (elizabethosterhoudt@montana.edu). Position will be open until filled.

Image of focal species, *Ochotona princeps*

