

## Eastern Conservation Science Team Member Profile:

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### **Melissa Clark**

**Spatial Ecologist**  
**Eastern Conservation Science**  
**Boston, MA**

#### **When you were little, what did you want to be?**

I grew up as a city kid in Wilmington Delaware, but I enjoyed getting out in nature on the weekends and on holidays. My family spent a lot of time going on nature walks, fishing as a family, going to the beach with relatives who lived on Chincoteague Island (VA), and camping with the Girl Scouts. Because nature wasn't something I experienced every day it was very special to me; something that had a lot of value to me as a kid, something to be protected. In school I really loved and excelled at math and computers, both of which I get to use every day; so I ended up in the right place!

#### **Why did you choose your profession?**

In high school I developed a love for science. In sophomore year American literature, we did a capstone research paper and I chose Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. I was interested in the tie between literature and science. Through that research project, , my eyes were opened to how humans had changed the environment and how powerful one voice backed by science could be; how one person could have such a positive impact on the world. Carson's work still inspires me today.

I did my undergrad at University of Delaware and majored in Environmental Science (and minored in Political Science). One of my first summer internship experiences was working in a microbiology lab, researching antibodies and human organ transplantation. I didn't have an experiment go correctly all summer, but I learned important lessons about the scientific process, met people that were passionate about their career, and started commuting (my first introduction to NPR). As I progressed through undergrad, I became more interested in how science was applied to make decisions. Knowing that I still had more to learn, I went directly to the University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources and the Environment for my master's degree. It was there that I discovered my love of conservation and spatial planning. I got my first real world experience during my master's thesis and through my first job working for the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy in Northern Michigan, creating conservation and farmland spatial priority protection plans.

#### **What's one project that you're working on right now?**

I'm very excited about the western US climate connectivity work. We have been developing a regional scale wall-to-wall map of climate connectivity for 10 years, which includes novel modeling techniques using Circuitscape. I hope, in the west, to be able to further refine our methods for climate connectivity in a largely connected landscape and be able to model connectivity at a national scale.

### **What was an accomplishment from last year that you're proud of?**

I recently started the PhD program at the University of New Hampshire in Natural Resources. I am taking classes where I want to increase my knowledge and skills, and my overall goal is to become more proficient in leading research and publishing efforts. Hopefully, there is a fair amount of overlap between my dissertation research and my work at TNC. It is taxing going to school part-time, working full-time, and maintaining a family life balance, but this new challenge is so far very interesting and intellectually stimulating.

### **How do you spend your free time?**



When I get some time to myself, especially now that the kids are getting older, I try to carve out time for exercise, which is good both mentally and physically. I don't have a lot of hand-eye coordination, so I tend to stick with endurance sports: running, cross-country skiing, and rowing. Over the winter, I've been working on running longer distances, which I haven't done since before kids. Now that the weather is getting warmer, I'm looking forward to rowing crew again with my rowing club, Great Bay Rowing. There is something magical about being on the water at dawn, with a group of friends all working towards the shared goal of moving with the most power

through the water. Every move is precise and needs to be made as a team. It is both physical and mental and helps center my day.

### **Tell us about your favorite thing/s to do with your family.**

My wife, Meghan, and I have two kids, Jack (8) and Beatrix (6). As a family we enjoy local short hikes and geocaching, and we get out a couple times while the weather is warmer for longer hikes in the White Mountains. Neither of my kids are big talkers, but we have found that as they hike we have great conversations and learn a lot about their world.

One of the cool things about kids as they get older is they develop their own hobbies and interests. I enjoy following them on their passions. Over the fall, I spent a lot of time learning about football with Jack (Go Patriots!). Beatrix is a little fish and the youngest member of the Oyster River Otters swim team. I join her during her meets on deck as a meet stroke and turn official. Also, this winter, we started skiing as a family every Sunday. It was so great to see the kids develop from novice to confident skiers... now much better than I am... happily conquering black diamonds.



**If you could travel anywhere, where would you go and why?**

I love to travel, and my kids are great travelers. I really enjoy experiencing new places and people through their eyes and experiences. We were lucky to have the opportunity two years ago to spend a semester living in Budapest, Hungary. It was both exciting and hard to live in a foreign country. It broadened all our world views, and we hope to keep and cultivate those perspectives in our New Hampshire lives.

As for places to travel, my wife, an archaeologist, loves cultural heritage sites and I love nature and beaches... and we both love good food...so, I think one place high on my list is Greece. The Greek classical archaeology sites are obviously amazing, the beaches are world class, and who doesn't like Greek food? There are also a lot of great places in the US to explore. In April, both my wife and I had work conferences out west. We flew to Denver and took a road trip around Colorado and New Mexico. It was so much fun to explore this new landscape with the kids.

**What is a favorite summer activity?**

The academic semester is almost over, and I am excited for a little break and some vacation time this summer. I am looking forward to warm weather and barbecuing on my deck, with a cold drink in my hand.



Top Left: Outside the Colosseum in Rome, Italy  
Top Left: Plitvice Lakes National Park, Croatia  
Right: Rocky Mountain National Park, CO USA