Dear Midwest Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation,

My name is Alison Ochs (ochs3@purdue.edu) and I am a PhD student at Purdue University. I am very interested in the position on the MWPARC advisory board, and I believe my experience in herpetology, conservation, and outreach make me a good candidate for the position.

I began my work in herpetology as an undergraduate at Mount Holyoke college, spending a summer as a Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) student studying the effects of hemlock woolly adelgid and associated hemlock forest decline on terrestrial salamanders at Harvard Forest. I was nominated to present my research at the Council on Undergraduate Research’s REU Symposium in Arlington, VA in 2014, and went on to publish a paper on my work in MDPI Environments. I obtained my Bachelor of Arts degree in Biology at Mount Holyoke College in 2017 and went on to study wood and spotted turtles with the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute (SCBI) in Virginia. I assisted with teaching a Master Naturalist course on herpetology and mentored Smithsonian-Mason School of Conservation (SMSC) undergraduate students, in addition to assisting with SCBI outreach events. I also joined the herpetology team on a Bioblitz near Shenandoah National Park and catalogued 16 species of reptiles and amphibians on the property to inform future management decisions. While with SCBI, I attended the Northeastern PARC conference in Amherst, MA in 2018 and presented on the effectiveness of salamanders as indicator species, a continuation of my work at Harvard Forest. I also joined the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Team (DEITT), and joined the Scholarship Team, where I helped design and implement the PARC Increasing Participation Award (PIPA), a scholarship for underrepresented groups to attend PARC meetings. In 2019 I began a PhD program at Purdue University studying the effects of timber management, including timber harvesting strategies and prescribed fire, on terrestrial salamanders at the Hardwood Ecosystem Experiment (HEE), a long-term research project in southern Indiana. In addition to my research, I have presented at several outreach events with the HEE to help inform forest managers and engage the general public. I also continued to work with my colleagues from Harvard Forest on the effectiveness of salamanders as indicator species. At MWPARC in 2019, I presented a poster on the preliminary results of my work at Purdue and, as a DEITT representative, I presented on the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in herpetological science. I am very excited to continue with the DEITT and work to make PARC a diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization for better member recruitment, engagement, and retention, and better conservation success.

Outside of herpetology, I have also studied the recovery of mangrove forest birds following forest restoration in Madagascar; investigated vegetation-carbon dynamics in Minnesota peatlands; examined invasive plants and fire dynamics in Florida; and explored the biodiversity of ferns in New Zealand. Additionally, I have assisted with projects on ants, small mammals, mangrove forest restoration, and fishery monitoring. In my home state of Arizona, I have worked on conservation projects including black-footed ferret population counts, burrowing owl rehabilitation, and invasive plant removal. While the bulk of my experience is with academic research, I also have experience with conservation, management, and working with groups with varied backgrounds.

I hope to bring my experience and perspective as a young scientist to the advisory board and help MWPARC grow as an organization.

Thank you for your consideration,

Alison Ochs