

Sarah Colombo

Undergraduate Institution:

Northern Arizona University

Career Goals:

Sarah's overarching goal following her graduate degree is to connect her passion for research in conservation to support social/environmental justice efforts as she believes there is an inextricable connection between them. She hopes to engage in solution-oriented research surrounding community ecology, endangered species, ecosystem response to climate change, and restoration, with an emphasis on community and collaboration. She believes that utilizing an interdisciplinary approach to conservation while incorporating multiple perspectives is crucial to the future of the discipline—this can be done with a social-ecological lens, by improving equity, and by actively centering those who have historically been left out of the field of conservation and decision making.



Biography:

Sarah has lived in The Southwest her entire life among the peoples, cultures, and landscapes of what we call Arizona. She experiences life with an emphasis on curiosity and wonder, and as a person who did not fit neatly into the mold society cast for others like her, curiosity became both a refuge and a proving ground for passion. Among the challenges of navigating the beauties and complexities of the world, she found solace in and developed a significant appreciation for natural spaces. It's the culmination of her passion, curiosity, connection to the earth, and her deep compassion for people, that sparked her interest in engaging in conservation.

Sarah's journey in conservation began during her initial time at Northern Arizona University, where she completed her B.S. in Environmental Sustainability Studies, with a minor in geology and an emphasis in Southwestern Environments and Biocultural Diversity. While exploring her own identity, she started to understand what role her passions may have in helping to increase representation in conservation. The path she has taken in life has led her to care deeply beyond her own experience and build empathy that she plans to use to help bridge the gap between science, conservation, and the impacts to historically underrepresented communities. As she grows within the field of conservation, she hopes to not only contribute to ecological research but to support others in BIPOC communities to connect with the earth, identify available resources, and foster their own diverse voice in conservation.

Since her time pursuing her undergraduate degree, Sarah developed professional collaboration, leadership, and communication skills. While outside of the environmental world for some time, she actively found ways to stay connected by volunteering for local non-profit restoration efforts. During this time, she gained perspective on the importance of community outreach/involvement and collaboration. In the few years before returning to academia, Sarah gained field experience working in remote areas of the Mojave and Sonoran Deserts, engaging in endangered wildlife and plant research and monitoring. Her current graduate research is focused on identifying the specific habitat requirements of an endemic cactus on the Colorado Plateau. The species is of conservation concern and she seeks to understand better the species' needs, distribution, and project possibilities for future distribution when faced with climate change. She hopes her research can help inform management decisions for the future conservation of the species.