Pika project summary:

This summer IPF helped the Front Range Pika Project (FRPP) collect observations of pikas at 7 sites located on Independence Pass. The FRPP is an initiative that uses citizen scientist volunteers to gather data on pika populations throughout Rocky Mountain National Park and the White River National Forrest. Combined, there are 666 sites where data is collected. This project has been going on for 10 years and aims to monitor the potential impacts of climate change on pikas and their habitats.

Karin and I visited these plots to record pika observations. The location of the plots varied in accessibility. One was not far above the highway near the Weller Lake parking area, whereas our Brooklyn Gulch plot was about a 3.5 mile hike off trail. Each plot was located within a talus field, and all were somewhat off trail. So, we used an app, Gaia GPS, to navigate to the exact center location of each plot. The diameter of our plot was 24m, which we marked with a rope. The pika signs we were looking for at each plot included pika calls, pika sightings, old & fresh pika scat, and old & fresh pika hay piles. Our observations had two parts: We began with a silent observation where, for 5 minutes, we sat and observed our plot listening and looking for any pika calls and sightings. Each observation we recorded within our data table. Next, we would complete a 20-30 minute systematic survey of our plot where we walked throughout the plot looking carefully for pika scat and hay piles, while also listening and looking for pikas. Whenever we saw or heard a pika within the plot, we also would measure the largest rock and deepest crevice within one meter of the sign.To finish up the site visit, we also completed a general site assessment. We took notes on a variety of conditions including the temperature, rock color, presence of water and the percent composition of the whole plot broken up into categories such as % grasses, % forbs, % trees, % bare ground, and % rocks. It was

clear that at sites which had smaller rocks, shallow crevices or very few grasses and forbs near the plot that few pikas were living directly in the plot. Often at plots where this was the case, we would notice pikas further outside the plot in areas with larger rocks or closer to growing vegetation.

All sites except for the plot across the highway from the Weller trailhead had pikas present. Check out the attached PDF to see what our data recording process looked like!

FRPP website: http://www.pikapartners.org