Spotlight on Women in Geothermal – July 2026

Kristie McLin, Utah FORGE

A Path Shaped by Curiosity and the Outdoors

Kristie McLin's journey into geothermal energy didn't begin in a classroom, it began outdoors, surrounded by the landscapes of New Mexico. Growing up in Albuquerque, she developed an early fascination with geology through hands-on experiences, including field trips, rock exploration, and visits to active mining operations. These early moments sparked a natural curiosity about the Earth and how it works.

Despite this exposure, geology wasn't her initial path. It wasn't until a college hike, where she found herself explaining rock formations and geologic features, that everything clicked. A simple question from her uncle, *"Why aren't you studying geology?"*, set her on a new trajectory. Soon after, she changed her major and transferred to New Mexico Tech, where her education became deeply rooted in fieldwork and real-world application.

Immersed in hands-on learning, Kristie developed a strong appreciation for observing geology directly in the field rather than through theory alone. This experience laid the foundation for her future work in subsurface systems. She continued her academic journey with graduate studies, eventually earning her PhD at the University of Utah, where she deepened her expertise in geothermal systems and reservoir behavior.

Building a Career in Oil & Gas—and Beyond

At a time when geothermal opportunities were limited, Kristie made a strategic decision to enter the oil and gas industry. She joined ConocoPhillips, where she began working in reservoir quality prediction, studying how geological processes impact porosity, permeability, and overall reservoir performance.

Over time, her role evolved well beyond traditional geology. She became increasingly involved in solving complex, cross-disciplinary problems, particularly those involving water systems and production challenges. Her ability to connect geology with operations and engineering quickly set her apart.

One of her most impactful roles came in the Permian Basin, where she led efforts to develop a comprehensive water management strategy for unconventional assets. At the time, industry was only beginning to recognize the scale and complexity of water challenges in shale development.

Kristie helped design and implement large-scale solutions, including produced water reuse systems, pipeline infrastructure, and storage strategies. She brought together teams across disciplines to build a cohesive, long-term approach, balancing technical, operational, and economic considerations.

This experience proved to be transformative. It not only strengthened her technical skillset but also gave her a deep understanding of field operations. She recognized early on that success depends on strong collaboration with field teams, the people responsible for executing and maintaining the systems on the ground.

Her ability to bridge disciplines became a defining characteristic of her career. She worked so seamlessly across geology, engineering, and operations that colleagues often assumed she belonged to multiple technical groups. This versatility allowed her to build a broad network and gain insight into nearly every aspect of the business.

Later, as a manager, Kristie brought a unique leadership style to her teams. She emphasized communication, mentorship, and regular engagement, prioritizing one-on-one interactions to support both technical work and career development. Her approach fostered trust, collaboration, and a highly functional team environment.

Returning to Geothermal—and Driving Innovation

As geothermal energy began gaining renewed attention, Kristie found her way back to the field that first inspired her. Through her involvement in evaluating emerging energy technologies, she re-engaged with geothermal and began contributing to assessments of new approaches, including Enhanced Geothermal Systems (EGS).

This work reconnected her with the geothermal community and positioned her at the forefront of industry developments. Ultimately, she transitioned to the University of Utah, where she now plays a leadership role in advancing geothermal research and innovation.

At the center of her work is the Utah FORGE project one of the most ambitious efforts aimed at de-risking next-generation geothermal technologies. In this role, Kristie is not only contributing to research but also leading development of what is effectively a full-scale operational facility.

Drawing on her oil and gas background, she quickly recognized the value of operational discipline in geothermal development. She has focused on establishing structured processes, including safety systems, standard operating procedures, and facility management practices. Her efforts reflect a broader industry shift from experimental pilots to scalable infrastructure.

Pushing Boundaries: The Future of Geothermal

Kristie is deeply focused on what comes next for geothermal energy. One of her key areas of interest is superhot rock geothermal, which involves accessing extremely high-temperature resources deep in the subsurface. These systems have the potential to dramatically increase energy output and efficiency, representing a significant leap forward for the industry.

Her vision is not just to replicate existing technologies but to push the boundaries, testing new well designs, fracture strategies, and system configurations that can unlock the next generation of geothermal solutions.

At the same time, she brings a pragmatic perspective shaped by years of experience. She understands that while geothermal holds immense promise, there are real technical and operational challenges that must be addressed. Her approach balances ambition with realism, emphasizing the importance of rigorous testing, thoughtful design, and continuous learning.

Lessons in Leadership and Growth

Kristie's career reflects continuous growth, adaptability, and curiosity. She has consistently sought out new challenges, applying for roles across disciplines and stepping into opportunities that expanded her experience.

Her willingness to explore different paths allowed her to build a uniquely broad skillset—one that spans technical depth, operational expertise, and leadership.

She encourages others to stay curious, build relationships, and take initiative. By engaging with people across teams and disciplines, she developed a strong network and a deep understanding of how complex systems function—both technically and organizationally.

Life Beyond Work

Outside of her professional career, Kristie remains deeply connected to the outdoors. Living in Salt Lake City, she enjoys easy access to national parks, mountains, and open landscapes—an environment that aligns perfectly with her lifelong interests.

She has also been actively involved in scouting, serving as a troop leader and participating in a wide range of high-adventure activities with her children. From backpacking in the backcountry to sailing and whitewater rafting, these experiences reflect her passion for exploration and hands-on learning.

At home, she enjoys crocheting, often taking on new and increasingly complex projects. Rather than repeating the same patterns, she prefers to challenge herself with something new, an approach that mirrors her mindset in her professional life.

A Career Defined by Curiosity and Impact

Kristie McLin's journey, from exploring rocks in New Mexico to leading cutting-edge geothermal initiatives—is a story of curiosity, resilience, and continuous evolution.

Her ability to bridge disciplines, embrace new challenges, and drive innovation has positioned her as a leader in the energy transition. As geothermal continues to grow in importance, her work is helping shape its future advancing technologies, improving execution, and unlocking new possibilities.

Above all, her career demonstrates the power of staying curious, taking risks, and remaining open to where the path might lead.

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