



Meet the Scientist!



<http://www.naturalinquirer.org>

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A dendroecologist uses tree rings to reconstruct climate, disturbances (including human land use), and other factors that influence tree growth.

Ms. Laurie Stroh Huckaby

(with Bristlecone pine tree)

Dendroecologist

M.S., Forest Ecology

Colorado State University

USDA Forest Service scientist

Important Scientist Characteristics

★ My superpower is the ability to see the thing that doesn't belong. I'm good at seeing patterns, and then noticing things that don't fit the pattern. The next most important talent—a gift, really—is curiosity. I always want to know more. And finally, humility. We can't understand new things or very old ones if we think we already know everything.

Example of a simple research question I have tried to answer:

I call my work "forensic ecology." We use the records kept by trees through their growth to understand what happened in the past. For example, how does fire occurrence in the past relate to fire and climate in the present?

Technology or equipment used in research:

In my science, we get to use a lot of power tools. For example, we use chainsaws to cut sections from old logs and belt sanders to sand the sections finely. The most useful tool is the increment borer. It's a very simple tool that allows us to take a pencil-sized core sample from a live tree without hurting the tree. I'm holding one in my picture.

Most Exciting Discovery

I have found six pieces of wood that are nearly 1000 years old right here in the Colorado Front Range. I had no idea they were that old when I found them; they just looked like charred, gray pieces of logs half-buried in the dirt. Once I got them back to the lab, I was able to cross-date them back to the early 1000s AD. That's before the Aztec or Incan Empires! The climate was different then, and the trees recorded that.

When did you know you wanted to be a scientist?

When I was six years old, my parents took me to the Denver Museum of Natural History. In the entryway was the fully assembled skeleton of a Tyrannosaurus Rex (it's still there). The minute I saw that, I knew I had to be a scientist.

<http://www.fs.fed.us/rm/forest-woodland/profiles/?last=Huckaby&first=Laurie>