As a paleontologist, I study plants and animals that are preserved in the earth. Essentially, I am a prehistoric wildlife biologist.

Barb Beasley

Paleontologist

M.S., Fort Hays State University

USDA Forest Service scientist

Barb Beasley

Important Scientist Characteristics:
My wide knowledge of fossils helps me in my career, including an understanding of plants, invertebrates, and vertebrates. This knowledge helps when I work with law enforcement regarding fossil thefts. I testify and provide reports of the scientific and commercial value of the fossils in legal cases.

Example of a simple research question I have tried to answer: What is the best way to manage paleontological (fossil) resources for future generations? Working for the Forest Service, I helped develop management strategies for paleontological resources for future generations. We based these strategies on scientific best practices and technical expertise.

Technology or equipment used in research: I use a variety of technology and equipment. In the field, I use a Trimble GeoExplorer Global Positioning System (GPS) unit and a Polaris utility task vehicle (UTV). In the preparation lab, where we clean the fossils we found outside, I use hand-held jackhammers operated by air pressure. These tools remove dirt and rock, called matrix, from the fossils.

Most Exciting Discovery
My most exciting discovery was my first discovery of a plesiosaur, a long-necked marine reptile, in southwest South Dakota.

When did you know you wanted to be a scientist?
My 5th grade science teacher brought fossils she found in her driveway into the classroom. She explained the fossilization process and what kinds of animals were fossilized. She asked us to look in our driveways and show what we found. I found a lot of fossils like corals, crinoids, clams, and bryozoans. I was hooked!

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