



# Meet the Scientist!



Dr. Mercer is pictured second from the right.

A forest economist uses the tools of economic analysis to study the interactions between people and forests relating to forest conservation and management.

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## Important Scientist Characteristics

Critical thinking, curiosity and not accepting conventional wisdom are most important for developing new researchable ideas and questions. Once a researchable question is formulated mathematical logic is crucial for framing the question. However, perseverance is most essential for success in science.

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

Forests provide mankind with essential ecosystem services, such as protecting the climate, purifying the water, and preserving habitat for endangered species. Since landowners are usually not paid for the ecosystem services their forests provide, they rarely manage their forests to increase or preserve the ecosystem services. Therefore, one of my research questions is, "What kinds of incentives are required to encourage landowners to manage their forests to produce ecosystem services for society?"

## Technology or equipment used in research:

Most of my work consists of collecting and analyzing economic data using advanced statistical analysis. Therefore, the only equipment I need is a good, fast computer.

## Most Exciting Discovery

In a study in Florida, we asked if controlled burns can reduce economic losses from wildfires. This was the first known study to empirically estimate the economic trade-offs between controlled burning and wildfire. We discovered that the current amount of controlled burning in Florida produces large economic benefits. Increasing the amount of controlled burning in Florida would generate even more benefits to society.

## When did you know you wanted to be a scientist?

High School.

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