

**Karen Holl**

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At high altitudes surrounded by blue sky and Rocky Mountain air, Karen Holl discovered her passion for restoration ecology as an undergraduate one summer, at the Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory in Colorado. Dr. Holl embraced the opportunity to help restore damaged ecosystems to a more healthy state. Beside the scientific challenges of what was then a relatively new field, she says, she was drawn in by the knowledge that day-to-day advances could make a real difference.

Since that time, Dr. Holl's fieldwork has taken her to Costa Rican rainforests, the grassland systems of Santa Cruz, California, and the riparian ecosystems along the Sacramento River. She has also worked on one of the toughest reclamation challenges, rebuilding healthy ecosystems atop former coal strip mines in Virginia. Wherever she goes, Dr. Holl strives to help heal the worst impacts of human action, while leaving a brighter future for humans and nature alike.

Dr. Holl says one of her most important goals is to help students and local people to lead environmental restoration projects. For example, in Costa Rica, deforestation and the conversion of coffee land to pasture for cattle grazing threaten vibrant rainforests. Dr. Holl works directly with local coffee farmers and landowners to help them understand value of these threatened ecosystems, and to restore their ecology.

If Dr. Holl was drawn to restoration ecology by its scientific challenges, she knows now that helping to build communication between researchers, policymaking and the public is perhaps the greatest challenge. When it works, she says, she gets to watch her students grow in their ability and understanding. And together, they get to see healthy ecosystems grow where once there had been none.

--Katie Jewett