



MEET A CONSERVATION CAREER PROFESSIONAL

Paulina Murray is the Research Manager at Holt Research Forest.

"These days, while I'm not getting paid to hike all day, I enjoy a well-rounded balance of field, lab, and computer work. During the field season, I supervise and mentor our field crew and research staff while supporting long-term ecological monitoring data collection in the forest. Afterward, I transition to the computer to manage and publish our data in a public archive. I also dedicate time to securing funding for our research program by preparing research proposals and grants."

WHAT EARLY OPPORTUNITIES DID YOU TAKE TO HELP YOU GET WHERE YOU ARE TODAY?

"I participated in various research opportunities on and off campus during my undergraduate studies. At my undergraduate institution, I participated in the 'Summer Scholars Program,' which allowed me to work closely with a professor over the summer on scientific research projects. My research focused on invasive plant species management and monitoring, and I actively contributed to the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation's invasive management program. I also presented my work at a regional conference. I continued to work as a research assistant for the same professor in the following years, contributing to similar projects. One summer, I participated in the Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) program at the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies, where I studied nitrogen retention in northeastern forest soils. During the academic year, I completed independent studies that showcased my data science skills. These research experiences and networking opportunities ultimately made me a competitive applicant for graduate school."

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE STUDENTS WHO ARE CONSIDERING YOUR CAREER PATH?

"I always advise students and early-career professionals to gain as much experience as possible in scientific research, whether through an academic summer program, professional internship, independent study, or job. Reach out to professors whose research aligns with your interests and inquire about opportunities to get involved. Many graduate students also hire undergraduates to assist with their field and lab work during the school year and summer. For those in grade school, seek out volunteer or summer work opportunities to explore different fields you may want to pursue."



"My favorite part of my job is getting paid to 'hike.' As a research assistant or technician, I had the opportunity to do that more frequently, but through my research, I've been fortunate to travel to some incredible places. I've explored and camped in remote locations across the Northeast—places I would never have the chance to visit otherwise, as they're not open to the public."