

Diana F. Tomback, Ph.D., Professor of Integrative Biology at the University of Colorado Denver

Bio:

Diana F. Tomback is Professor of Integrative Biology at the University of Colorado Denver, with expertise in forest ecology and conservation biology. She received a B.A. and M.A. at UCLA and Ph.D. at the University of California Santa Barbara. As a graduate student, she began pioneering studies of Clark's nutcracker, a keystone avian seed disperser, and an ecologically important but rapidly declining high elevation conifer, whitebark pine. Author of more than 100 peer-reviewed publications, she has conducted research in National Parks and National Forests across the western U.S. and Canada. In 2001, Tomback and colleagues started the Whitebark Pine Ecosystem Foundation (WPEF) to advocate for restoration. Tomback served as volunteer Director of the WPEF for 16 years and now oversees Policy and Outreach. In this role, she is a key organizer of the National Whitebark Pine Restoration Plan in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service and American Forests.

Title:

The National Whitebark Pine Restoration Plan: restoration model for the High Five pines.

Story:

I grew up in the heart of Los Angeles, but developed a passion for high mountains, and especially the Sierra Nevada, through trips with family and later with friends while at UCLA. My doctoral research topic was the result of a fortuitous encounter with Clark's nutcrackers and whitebark pine while backpacking during my M.S. work at UCLA. My early studies of nutcracker behavioral ecology and whitebark pine ecology led to many questions concerning how nutcrackers shaped the ecology, distribution, and population biology of whitebark pine and other five-needle pine relatives, including limber pine, southwestern white pine, Swiss stone pine, and sugar pine. These studies, in collaboration with students and other colleagues, have required diverse research techniques from ornithology, population genetics, and forest ecology. In addition, over the last decade we have examined whitebark pine's ecological role in Rocky Mountain treeline communities, entailing research in spectacular landscapes from whitebark's northern boundary in Canada through the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. During much of my work, the decline of whitebark pine has been an ongoing theme. High priority for me has been advocacy on behalf of this ecologically important and unique species.