

## *Murray F. Buell Award*

Murray F. Buell ascribed great importance to the participation of students at meetings and to excellence in the presentation of papers. To honor his dedication to the Ecological Society of America and to the younger generation of ecologists, this award is presented to a student for the outstanding oral paper presented at the Society's Annual Meeting.

The winner of the Buell award for 2011 was Jenny Talbot, for her presentation entitled, *Does lignin composition control litter decay rates*, given at the 2010 ESA meeting in Pittsburgh.

This research was part of her dissertation at the University of California, Irvine under the supervision of Kathleen Treseder. Talbot received her B.A. in Chemistry from Boston University in 2004. She investigated whether and how the chemical composition of lignin affects rates of litter decomposition. To do this, she took a tool more often used in molecular biology labs than ecology, *Arabidopsis* mutants, and used it in field experiments. She compared the wild type and three mutants that differed in aspects of lignin structure in a field litter decomposition study. She found that structural changes in the syringyl and 5-hydroxyguaiacyl subunits had no effect on decomposition rates relative to wild type litter, while plants upregulated in the synthesis of cinnamylaldehydes decomposed faster than wild type plants. These comparisons enabled new hypotheses about the biochemical mechanisms that determine decomposition rates in the field. The Buell judges were very impressed by Talbot's ability to concisely explain her complicated experiment. She presented potentially difficult concepts clearly and confidently in an outstanding presentation.

