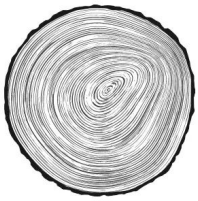
Tree Rings and Climate

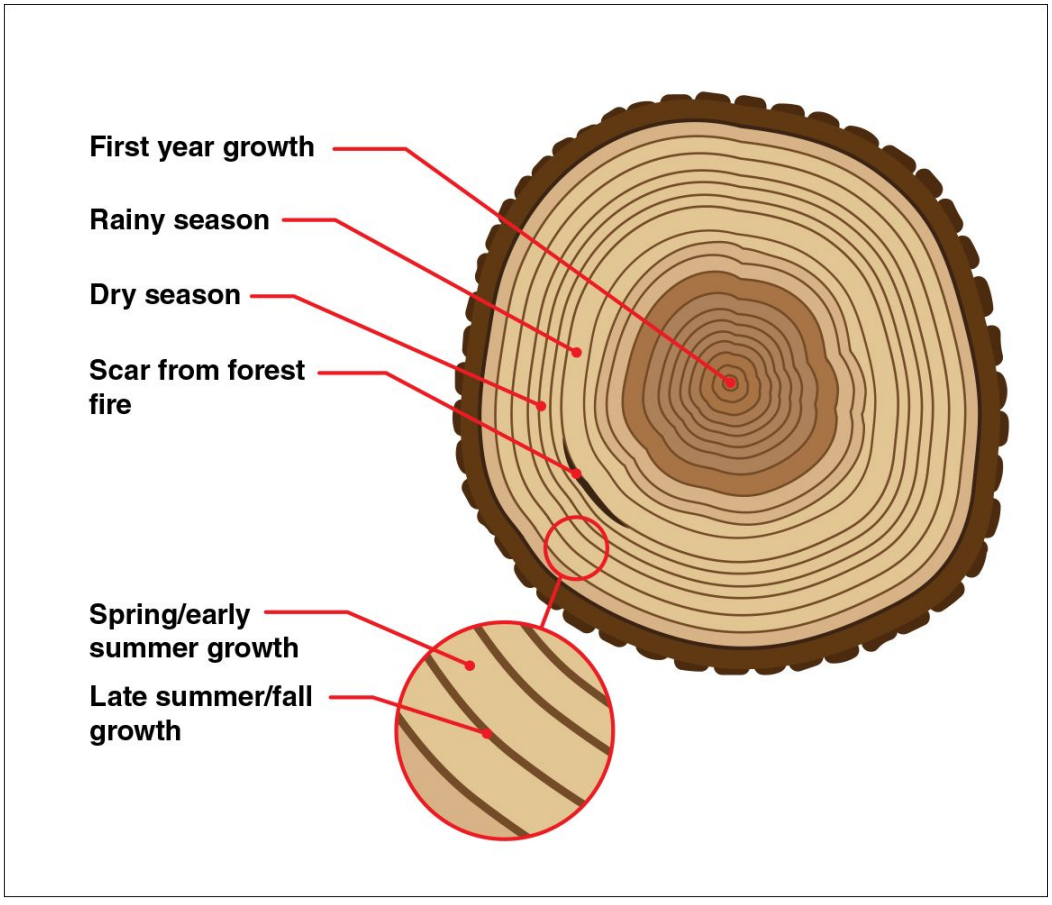
Climate scientists can learn about the climate of the past by measuring how much trees have grown each year. There are two ways to look at tree growth rings:

Tree Ring = a cross section of a trunk that can be cut from a dead tree.



Tree Core = a thin, cylindrical sample that can be drilled from a living tree.

Drilling a tree core,
photo credit: National Park Service



In regions like Colorado, trees grow more in wet years and less in dry years. This means **the thickness of each year tells scientists how much precipitation fell**. Scientists can also see evidence of past fires where a tree was burned, but still survived and continued to grow around the burn scar.

NOAA's **National Centers for Environmental** Information maintains an archive of paleoclimate data from tree rings and other sources.