

GLOBE North America Phenology Campaign:

Dr. Alison Post Q&A Transcript

Dr. Alison Post: My name is Alison Post and I'm a research scientist and a program manager at University of Colorado in Boulder.

U.S. GLOBE: What kind of research do you do?

Alison P.: I mostly study how grasslands respond to different climate variables, so rainfall and temperature, and how that's changing with climate change.

U.S. GLOBE: When did you know you wanted to be a scientist?

Alison P.: You know, growing up I always enjoyed being outside looking at plants. So I focus on plants in my research. But I think one story I can tell is, I don't know, when I was in middle school, maybe 9 or 10, I was really into growing our garden and I wanted to grow watermelons. And so we planted watermelons and then the little guys started growing and I wanted to know how fast they were growing. So I took our kitchen scale out and I weighed the watermelons every day. And kept a record of that to see how fast they were growing. And I think that's kind of when I realized I like nature and I also like being able to quantify it and track it. And I think that looks like a career path.

U.S. GLOBE: What is the research question you've tried to answer?

Alison P.: The project that I am working on right now is looking at grasslands. You can see my nice background here. And you know, we think about trees a lot. We think about their phenology. So they green up in the spring, they change colors, but we don't think about grasslands as much.

And so my project was focused on using PhenoCam data, which I can talk about more, to decide or to understand what causes grasslands to green up in the spring and to then turn brown in the fall. So if it's a combination of temperature or rainfall and how are those changing over time as well.

U.S. GLOBE: Why is studying phenology important?

Alison P.: I'm a little biased because that is what my research is. I study phenology, but I think phenology is important because it's a really great indicator, super visual, super easy to see what's happening in our world at any time. So you know, when trees green up in the spring or change color or when grasslands green up in the spring is all dependent on temperature and precipitation or rainfall that's happened over the past months, before that time period.

And so I think phenology is a great way to track changes in weather and climate and also to see how climate change is influencing our ecosystems.

U.S. GLOBE: What equipment or technology do you use in your research?

Alison P.: So I mentioned PhenoCams and these are a really cool way to track phenology measures. So it's using a technique, it's called repeat digital photography, which is just, they're like security cameras. They kind of look like those and they're mounted above the canopy, so above the treetops or above, you know, the grass fields. And they take pictures of those ecosystems every 30 minutes. And so you get really fine scale data on what the leaves and the plants are looking like through the whole season.

And that's a really great way to be able to determine, you know, what day in the spring did the grasses start to green up. When do plants start flowering? When do the trees start changing color?

And so I tend to use the data from this PhenoCam network. There's over 700 cameras in the US and around the world, and you can go online and just see the pictures in real time. So if you want to go see what's happening, you know, in California today or in Hawaii today, you can just click on that site and see what it looks like, which is really fun.

U.S. GLOBE: What is your favorite fall activity?

Alison P.: Well, fall's my favorite season, so I like a lot of things about fall. I grew up on the East Coast even though I'm in Colorado now. And so something that I really enjoyed on the East Coast is all the, all the apples that we get there.

And so every week or every year, there'd be a weekend in the fall where my family would pile into our car and we'd drive around Western Maryland and Pennsylvania and collect all the different apple varieties and bring them back and eat them all. And you know, the leaves would be pretty at that point. And so that's probably my favorite fall activity. We replicate it a bit here, although there's a lot fewer apple trees in Colorado.