



# Meet the Scientist!



Ecology is the study of how organisms interact with each other and their environment. I am a plant ecologist.

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### Important Scientist Characteristics:

Curiosity is the most important characteristic of a scientist. I find almost everything in the natural world fascinating and beautiful. When I see a new plant or visit a new forest, I can not help but want to know more and share what I learn.

### Example of a simple research question I have tried to answer:

Is the death of pine trees from bark beetles causing an increase in new tree growth? If yes, is this increase in tree growth larger for some tree species than others?

### Technology or equipment used in research:

I use fish-eye photography to estimate the sunlight available to plants. A fish-eye lens can “see” a full 180 degrees. The lens captures an image from one horizon to the other. Using computer software, I can turn this picture into an estimate of how much sunlight a plant or tree seedling experiences.

### Most Exciting Discovery

Many animals eat aspen trees, stopping small aspen trees from growing. We found that this did not occur where many pine trees were killed by beetles, like Colorado. Once the dead pine trees fall, they are protecting aspen trees from damage caused by animals. Some things we consider “bad,” like many dead trees, can play an important ecological role.

### When did you know you wanted to be a scientist?

I spent each summer outside or staring out the window on road trips across the Western United States. I saw patterns in plants and wondered how and why plants live where they live. I decided I wanted to answer that question then, but did not yet know how.

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