

Hi, I'm Dr. Susan Meyer.

I'm a research ecologist at the Rocky Mountain Research Station Shrub Sciences Laboratory

in Provo, Utah.

I grew up in the Intermountain West and sagebrush was the first plant I ever learned so it was like getting my dream job when I landed a job here at the Shrub Sciences Laboratory.

I worked for many years with establishment ecology and seedling ecology of native plants

because our mission here at the lab is restoration of damaged or destroyed shrub lands and that was very constructive work.

I did that for a long time but as I carried on through my career, I watched millions of acres

of beautiful native shrub land disappear because of wildfires and I learned that the main cause

of these wildfires was a weed, a weed called cheat grass, which is an annual,

it's very flammable and it starts huge fires in the summer and the shrubs are not adapted

to those fires so we lose these shrub lands.

So I decided that if I was really going to have an impact and help achieve the mission of our unit, I was going to learn how to control this weed and make it easier to establish native vegetation.

Fortunately I had an ally here at the lab, Dr. David Nelson, who was the plant pathologist here.

I was able to learn from him and we worked together to look at native fungal pathogens that already occur on cheat grass and trying to figure out how we could use those pathogens

as bio controls to push this weed back so that we would then be able to successfully seed native plants.

And we're still working on this many years later.

It's not an easy thing to achieve but we've been able to work with some very colorfully named pathogens like head smut, and black fingers of death, and bleach blond syndrome, and seed rot, and all sorts of charming organisms but they're all enemies of cheat grass that we're trying to use singly or in combination to push back cheat grass so that we can successfully restore these very valuable native shrub lands.