

The Coda Files

Alison Greenberg

Think being or hosting a Coda Global Fellow is mysterious and unattainable? Think again! The Coda Global Fellows program enables staff to apply their talents beyond their regular job to forward the Conservancy's global priorities. Coda Fellows can be anyone. They can be anywhere. They could even be...you. So take a step with us into...The Coda Files.

"Philanthropy staff are practicing anthropologists at heart," says Craig Leisher, TNC social scientist, TNC Poverty Alleviation team lead and one of Alison Greenberg's Coda Fellowship advisors. "They know how to study people, they are great listeners and can quickly relate to almost anyone even if cultural similarities are close to zero."

Alison exemplified these abilities in her first social science field experience with Craig. "During our study of the socioeconomic impacts of TNC's Niobrara Preserve [Nebraska], we noticed a trend in local ranchers' responses to our question, 'why won't you burn on your property?'" said Alison. "The answer was consistently, 'TNC hasn't shown me the benefit to my bottom line — in terms of the almighty dollar — of burning! I couldn't care less about habitat for Sandhill Cranes!'"

"Well, no one from the preserve had examined and quantified the economics of burning," adds Alison, "even though it's pretty clear that burning would make the grasses stronger and more nutritious for grazing, as well as manage the spread of the Eastern Red Cedar, which is causing significant economic and environmental harm to the grasslands. But it was never the preserve's goal to be a multiplier, to change ranchers' practices. Niobrara never had social or economic objectives; its role was to be a land-protection and research demonstration site. So the program hadn't invested in an economist to demonstrate the value of burning to our rancher neighbors...that was a huge wake-up call for me."

Coda Fellow: Alison Greenberg

Day Job: Senior principal gifts officer, The Nature Conservancy

Assignment: Social Science Integration Project

Duration: July 2011-December 2011

Take-Home Lesson: "It's become totally clear to me that, at the end of the day, human behavior and decisions will make or break TNC's goals."



The Niobrara field experience inspired Alison to undertake a Coda Fellowship to integrate social science into the Conservancy's robust biological scientific capacity because, as she put it, "we owe it to our staff, our partners and our donors to demonstrate the impact our work has on people, and to design our priority projects with people in mind." Alison has created a Social Science Task Force with Craig and her other advisor, TNC's senior social scientist Supin Wongbusarakum, to receive critical input and guidance from key Conservancy staff on how best to achieve this integration. Alison puts the likelihood of success at an all-time high.

"It's an exciting time to be doing this at TNC," she says. "Mark Tercek and our executive team are keenly aware that our conservation strategies must improve human well-being, and are enormously supportive of this effort to show how this can be done effectively."

Supin is thrilled and delighted with the experience, innovation and dedication Alison brings to her Coda Fellowship. "I had a dream that the Conservancy would strategically integrate human well-being into conservation. The dream that I had thought would take 10 years to bring to fruition is now beginning to blossom." **SC**

— [Jensen Montambault](#), applied conservation scientist, Central Science, The Nature Conservancy

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