MEMBER PROFILE

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Describe your work.

I apply known and emerging scientific findings to the development or refinement of programs and policies directed at Great Lakes excellence. I am also aiming to get a better understanding of good governance and how truly meaningful multi-sectoral engagement can enrich collaborative decision making and change the future for the better.

Describe how you engage with policy making.

I was Great Lakes Senior Policy Advisor in the province of Ontario, and I helped decision makers understand how science can inform better policy directions in the face of competing government priorities, economic constraints, equity, inclusion, and societal change. Presently, all my research is focused on addressing ongoing environmental and governance challenges faced by Great Lakes managers and program practitioners.

What advice do you have for other researchers to engage at the science-policy nexus?

To do this well, you must first speak science without jargon. Use simple language as if you were describing your scientific information to your neighbors or family members. You need to understand the nature of the policy maker's request for information. Complex scientific discourse does not help, it only serves to confuse. Overly emphasizing scientific uncertainty and failing to make your best efforts to provide the information in an understandable format will make you irrelevant.

What has been the biggest success story (yours or others) of large lakes research informing policy for good?

One interesting undertaking was the Great Lakes Futures Project, a collaboration among Canadian and U.S. universities and government personnel, within which we explored drivers of change in the Great Lakes regime. Using scenario analysis, we imagined four possible futures and the policy regimes necessary to enable those futures. This allowed students, faculty, the private sector, and the public sector to understand the policy directions necessary to achieve the desired future state of a resilient Great Lakes basin economy, social well-being, and environmental excellence.

Another excellent application of research informing policy was my time as the coordinator of the Collingwood Harbour Remedial Action Plan. Science enabled an understanding of the causes for environmental degradation. Science and engineering enabled a response through active, targeted interventions. Policy determined what to do, when, how, and with whom, and then, ultimately, the decision to delist Collingwood Harbour as an Area of Concern.



What are some of the biggest research needs to inform policy?

Still outstanding is a framework to assess future emerging threats to the integrity of the Great Lakes. We need a systematic method for predicting new threats and prioritizing them for policy responses. Presently the International Joint Commission's Great Lakes Early Warning System working group, on which I am privileged to serve, is grappling with this very matter. I hope we are successful; it is not yet clear that we will be. In the end, we will do our best to make the lakes great.