IAGLR
LAKES Letter

This issue shares stories from the pandemic, including highlights from our first-ever virtual conference

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IAGLR past, present, future

by **Ed Verhamme**



One question has been burning in my mind since I became president of IAGLR during the COVID-19 pandemic: Who is IAGLR? I've attended 19 IAGLR-hosted conferences, and I thought I knew the answer to that question. Prior to the first-ever virtual IAGLR conference and the Black Lives Matter movement, I would have answered that IAGLR was an inclusive organization for those interested in understanding the Laurentian Great Lakes and other large lakes. However, it is clear there are very real barriers to entry for membership and inclusion in our association. Attending annual conferences in person (often in remote cities throughout the region) requires considerable time and resources, and publishing in our journal also requires an alignment of opportunities and institutional access that aren't equally available. As the premiere research association for the great lakes of the world, we are missing the voices and expertise of Black, Brown, and Indigenous members of our community at almost every level of the association. This is not new information for anyone who has attended the annual conference. The issues that affect the integrity and sustainability of freshwater in our communities are complex, and it's time for our association to strengthen its connection to and involvement from Black, Brown, and Indigenous people, as well as women, LGBTQ+, and other marginalized members of our community.

The IAGLR Board of Directors, along with members and outside advisors, are working to broaden the social and cultural fabric of our association beyond its traditional science-only focus. This work began in 2017 with the hosting of State of Lake meetings to bring the association to local communities throughout the Great Lakes region every fall. These efforts continued into 2018 when IAGLR appointed its first international board member, and recently into 2020 with the hosting of a virtual conference and panel discussion on Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI).

These actions are only the beginning and were all initiated prior to the brutal murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Going forward, I expect that IAGLR will continue to examine the answer to the question, Who is IAGLR? As a primarily volunteer-based organization, IAGLR cannot reach these goals without you. We need to hear from you about your experiences and recommendations for actions we can take together. IAGLR needs help to identify and remove barriers and add resources that members can bring to their home institutions to support Black-, Indigenous-, and Brown-led efforts. The JEDI panel discussion and the conversations that led its inclusion in IAGLR 2020 Virtual started a conversation that will continue. Please reach out to me or other members of the board to provide input, volunteer your time, develop resources, and share your experiences. I also need you to hold the association accountable to these shared goals. In the meanwhile, please enjoy this issue of *Lakes Letter,* which features highlights from the JEDI panel and other conference events.

Ed Verhamme is IAGLR president and a project engineer with LimnoTech.