IAGLR

LAKES Letter

Science under threat

Stories from the field

Summer 2025, No. 26

LAKES *Letter*
SUMMER 2025, No. 26
iaglr.org/lakesletter

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Advertising
Direct inquiries to lakesletter@iaglr.org.

Lakes Letter is published quarterly by the International Association for Great Lakes Research and is available online. IAGLR is a U.S. 501(c)(3) organization devoted to advancing understanding of the world's great lake ecosystems.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Dear colleagues,

Welcome to the summer issue of *Lakes Letter*, which focuses on recent cuts to U.S. science programs and amplifies the voices of 87 participants from our recent survey "Share Your Story." For both contributors and those who reviewed the responses, these accounts were not easy to share or process. On behalf of the IAGLR team, thank you for your openness and trust—we have done our best to reflect the key findings. We also value the contributions about NOAA GLERL, the Sea Lamprey Control Program, and early career researchers that help round out our coverage of these impacts, as well as articles on the crucial need for federal investment, new approaches, and strategic planning as we look to the future of Great Lakes research.

One message that resonated strongly from the survey responses was the call for IAGLR not only to promote Great Lakes science, but also to be a voice for the people who make it possible. This perspective has already shaped many of our media contributions this year (see IAGLR in the News), and the IAGLR Board of Directors will continue to reflect on how to address this role more fully. Reporting on the disruption caused by recent U.S. policy changes remains challenging, as shifting policies require ongoing adjustments—what is accurate today may not remain accurate for long.

This issue also shares survey feedback from our annual conference, held this past June in Milwaukee. While the event posed financial challenges, participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive and the program was robust, thanks to the dedication of Harvey Bootsma and the School of Freshwater Sciences team. For many, the conference was a welcome break from present challenges, a chance to reconnect and focus on what we do best: science. Although about 600 people attended, we felt the absence of many colleagues from government agencies.

Our conference team is now turning its attention to our next annual conference, which will be a joint event with the Society for Canadian Aquatic Sciences. The conference will be held in Winnipeg next May and hosted by the IISD Experimental Lakes Area. We encourage you to submit a session proposal by the September 19 deadline.

Finally, I want to highlight our current call for board members. Our association relies on the leadership of a diverse and committed group of volunteers to advance our mission. If you have questions about the role, please get in touch—and consider putting your name forward in the upcoming election.

Sincerely,

Jérôme Marty

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Departments

Association News

Member News

On the Cover. Protesters march at the Stand Up for Science rally in Madison, Wisconsin, March 7, 2025. Photo by Elizabeth Larson.

Features

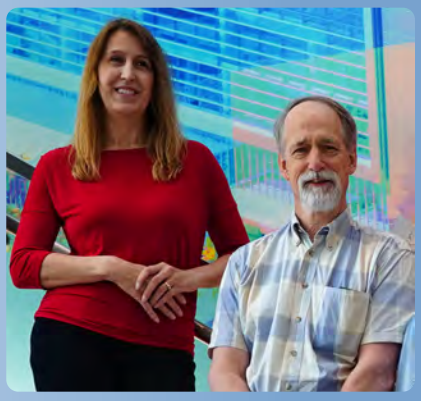
ASSOCIATION NEWS

IAGLR Board of Directors update

With U.S. policy constraints affecting our traditional leadership transition, the IAGLR Board of Directors acted to ensure continuity by extending Donna Kashian's presidency for one additional year, with the ongoing support of Past President Neil Rooney (University of Guelph). Kashian is a professor in the Department of Biology at Wayne State University, where she also directs the Environmental Science Program and the UN Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development in the Detroit-Windsor region.

We are also pleased to announce Noel Urban (Michigan Technological University) as our new vice president. Urban joined the board in May 2022 and also serves as current chair of the Conference Committee.

Also joining the board this year are directors Leigh McGaughey (St. Lawrence River Institute) and Pengfei Xue (Michigan Technological University), student board member Navjot Dhaliwal (York University), and Treasurer Mike McKay (University of Windsor).



President Donna Kashian and Vice President Noel Urban after the board meeting in June in Milwaukee.

View looking north of eroding Lake Michigan bluffs in Manistee County, Michigan, in 2021. Photo credit: Ethan Theuerkauf.

Coastal processes highlighted in journal

The August issue of the *Journal of Great Lakes Research* features a special section titled "Great Lakes Coastal Processes." This collection of articles provides new insights into coastal processes in large lakes associated with changing hydrodynamic conditions. Editors for the section are Ethan Theuerkauf, Guy Meadows, Chin Wu, Cary Troy, Pengfei Xue, Adam Bechle, Longhuan Zhu, Mark Breederland, Harvey Thorleifson, and Lorelle Meadows.

If you're interested in publishing a special section, please submit a Special Section Proposal Form for feedback.

Bylaws vote ushers in change to vice president election

Last month, IAGLR members unanimously approved changes to the association's bylaws. The most significant change involves how the vice president is selected. In the past, only current board members were eligible, and the board itself chose the vice president from among interested candidates.

Moving forward, the vice president will be elected directly by the membership during the annual board elections. Candidates must be IAGLR members and are encouraged, though not required, to have prior board experience. The role is a three-year commitment, serving first as vice president, then as president, and finally as past president.

"This change opens the door to a broader, more diverse pool of candidates and gives our membership an even greater voice in choosing IAGLR's leadership," says IAGLR President Donna Kashian. "Now more than ever, we need leadership that reflects the breadth of perspectives and experiences in our community to guide us through the challenges and opportunities facing the Great Lakes."

If you are interested in running for vice president—or any of the other five positions on the ballot this year—please review the Call for Nominations. We also encourage members to reach out to colleagues who would make strong candidates for these important leadership roles.

New Student and Early Career Committee announced

Building a foundation for the next generation of Great Lakes leaders

BY NAVJOT DHALIWAL & ALEXANDER DUNCAN, Co-chairs, Student and Early Career Committee

We are thrilled to announce the launch of IAGLR's new Student and Early Career (SEC) Committee; a dedicated space to foster community, collaboration, and professional development for students and early career researchers across the large lakes research community.

The SEC Committee is committed to:

- Supporting professional development through workshops, training, and resources
- Creating networking opportunities that connect emerging scholars with peers and established leaders
- Promoting inclusion and engagement of early career voices across IAGLR's programming
- Bridging generations by serving as a conduit between students, early career professionals, and seasoned researchers and knowledge holders

Future activities could include student-led conference events, peer mentorship programs, fundraising opportunities, and collaborative projects that elevate early career contributions in large lake research around the world. By joining, you can help shape this committee and the future of IAGLR.

Get involved!

We are currently welcoming new members to help shape the direction and priorities of the SEC Ad-Hoc Committee. This is an exciting opportunity to be part of something new —where your voice and ideas will directly influence the committee's activities and vision from the ground up.

To sign up please complete our registration form. We hope to hear from you.

Sign up today!

Navjot Dhaliwal is a P.h.D. candidate in the Department of Geography, Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change, York University. Alexander Duncan is a Ph.D. candidate at the Centre for Indigenous Fisheries Faculty of Science, University of British Columbia.

Alex Duncan (left) and Najot Dhaliwal (right) will co-chair IAGLR's new Student and Early Career Committee. They are pictured here with Janessa Esquible (Great Lakes Fishery Commission) at IAGLR's annual conference this past June in Milwaukee.

IAGLR 2025 gets high marks from attendees

In June, IAGLR hosted its 68th Annual Conference on Great Lakes Research, drawing more than 600 participants from 18 countries. The conference created a vibrant and welcoming environment that highlighted both the breadth and depth of Great Lakes science around the world. Attendees responded enthusiastically: 96% rated the quality of the scientic program as "excellent" or "good."

The survey feedback tells a strong story about the conference's impact on participants:

- 97% felt welcome at the event
- 93% said the conference was beneficial to their career
- 93% reported they gained knowledge outside their own area of expertise
- 92% agreed the conference helped them feel connected to the Great Lakes community
- 92% rated the conference experience as "excellent" or "good"
- 89% agreed they gained new insights within their own field

Logistical aspects of the conference were also well received. Among respondents:

- 92% would like to continue the midweek break
- 73% supported continuing the hybrid conference, while another 19% were unsure
- When asked about sporting events, preferences varied: 48% expressed little interest in hockey or soccer games, 19% enjoyed having both, 17% preferred soccer, and 5% preferred hockey

The survey was distributed to all 638 attendees, with 18% responding. Respondents were mostly white (77%), women (56%), and from the United States (78%). Nearly two-thirds were from academic institutions (63%), while others came from the federal government (13%), state government (10%) , and nonprofit organizations (9%).

In terms of participation, 68% of respondents gave a presentation during the conference, and about 12% joined virtually. Notably, the event attracted many new participants—43% indicated it was their first IAGLR conference. The career stage of attendees was varied, with over one-third (35%) identifying as mid-career professionals, while others indicated mid career (26%), student (19%), late career (14), and retired (6%).

Taken together, these results underscore the conference's continued role as both a scientific and professional hub—bringing people together, fostering knowledge exchange, and strengthening the Great Lakes research community.

"Loved seeing so much progress. Many new topics and talks. Lots of great collaborations that seem to be accelerating science. Felt the talks and sessions were also high quality and speakers were prepared and engaging."






Top middle photo by Paula McIntyre. All others by Stephany Hildebrand.

CONNECTED WATERS

Bridging Communities & Ideas

Call for Sessions

The International Association for Great Lakes Research and the Society of Canadian Aquatic Sciences invite you to propose a session for our joint conference next May. Hosted by IISD Experimental Lakes Area, the event will bring together natural and social scientists, environmental engineers, practitioners, decision makers, community members, and others to highlight collaborative efforts in addressing aquatic challenges across Canada, the Great Lakes, and beyond.

The conference is a hybrid event, and session chairs should be prepared to facilitate a session that welcomes both in-person and virtual oral presentations and audience participation.

iaglr.org/iaglr-scas26

May 25-29, 2026
Winnipeg, Manitoba

DUE FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 19

Congratulations IAGLR award and scholarship winners

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Deborah Lee received the IAGLR Lifetime Achievement Award for important and continued contributions to large lake research. As the recent director of NOAA's Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory, Lee's foresight, innovation, and unwavering commitment to excellence set a standard for the field. Her role in shaping international regulatory frameworks, such as Plan 2014, demonstrated a remarkable ability to restore ecological balance to Lake Ontario while balancing diverse stakeholder interests. Lee consistently demonstrated the ability to navigate complex challenges, addressing critical issues like climate change and harmful algal blooms in the Laurentian Great Lakes. In collaborating with a wide array of partners—including academic, government, and industry representatives—she kept the region's scientific research at the forefront while ensuring its relevance and impact. Beyond science, her dedication to creating opportunities for underrepresented groups in the field has brought about a meaningful shift in the diversity of the research community.

Photo by Stephany Hildebrand.

JOHN R. (JACK) VALLENTYNE AWARD

John Hartig (University of Windsor) has championed ecosystem restoration for more than 45 years, including through the creation and management of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. The refuge serves as a model for binational collaboration and community engagement. Hartig's ability to convene and connect diverse groups—from government agencies and research institutions to grassroots organizations and local residents—has been essential in building consensus and catalyzing real, lasting change. Hartig has a unique capacity to communicate complex environmental issues in ways that resonate with a broad audience. Through his long-running "Great Lakes Moment" column and numerous other public outreach efforts, he has made scientific knowledge accessible, inspiring action and hope across communities. He has shown a remarkable talent for blending historical context, policy insight, and ecological science to tell the evolving story of the Great Lakes with clarity and purpose.

ANDERSON-EVERETT AWARD

Paul Sibley received this award in recognition of his long-time service to IAGLR. Sibley's generosity with his time, his humility, and his deep institutional knowledge have made him a trusted and respected voice across the board and committees for many years. His leadership as president in 2019—and particularly through the unprecedented challenges of 2020—was marked by resilience, vision, and calm resolve. When the COVID-19 pandemic forced the cancellation of our in-person conference in Manitoba, he guided IAGLR through the transition to our first-ever virtual conference at a time when few could predict how such a format would be received. He also helped shape IAGLR's long-term direction, co-leading the strategic planning process. Sibley also co-chaired the highly successful 59th Annual Conference on Great Lakes Research at the University of Guelph in 2016, played a key role in the State of Lake conference series, and supported early career scholars through scholarship reviews and publication awards.

LARGE LAKE CHAMPION AWARD

Mary-Claire Buell (Trent University), was recognized for her outstanding leadership in fostering ethical community-based research that centers Indigenous voices and priorities around the Laurentian Great Lakes. Her pivotal role in establishing the Indigenous Great Lakes Network Initiative has helped to create an essential platform for collaboration between Indigenous communities and researchers. Buell is noted for her focus on relationship building over extractive research, promoting long-term partnerships, mentorship, and mutual benefits. Her efforts have led to impactful initiatives such as culturally relevant fish consumption guides and the integration of Indigenous knowledge with contemporary ecological science

Ted Lawrence (African Center for Aquatic Research and Education) has made transformative contributions to the science, governance, and international collaboration surrounding large lakes, particularly the African Great Lakes. Through his leadership at ACARE, Ted has created vital spaces for collaboration between African and North American scientists, building bridges that have strengthened both science and policy for the African Great Lakes. His commitment to inclusive capacity building, from the African Women in Science program to the lake-specific advisory committees, has laid a foundation that will support sustainable lake management for generations.

Chris Winslow (Ohio Sea Grant) was recognized for his capacity to consistently bring together people—researchers, agency staff, community members, and decision makers—to address the many challenges facing the Laurentian Great Lakes. The programs and partnerships that he has helped to build not only support great science but also make it accessible and actionable for those who need it most. From his leadership in the formation of the Lake Erie and Aquatic Research Network, through the development of the H2Ohio Wetland Monitoring Program, to the establishment of the annual "State of the Science" meetings, he has created meaningful space for collaboration, learning, and progress across so many areas.

Pictured above: IAGLR President Donna Kashian and Executive Director Jérôme Marty with Ted Lawrence and Chris Winslow.

JOURNAL AWARDS

Richard Barbiero, Lyubov Burlakova, James Watkins, Alexander Karatayev, and **Barry Lesht** received the **Chandler–Misener Award** for their article "The benthic nepheloid layer in the offshore waters of the Great Lakes and its post-dreissenid disappearance," published in the *Journal of Great Lakes Research,* Volume 50, Issue 5, 2024.

Bianca Possamai (University of Vermont) received the **Elsevier Early Career Scientist Award** for the article "Are lakemounts hotspots of productivity and biodiversity?," published in the *Journal of Great Lakes Research,* Volume 50, Issue 6, 2024. Co-authors include Ellen Marsden, John Janssen, Michael D. Rennie, Thomas Hrabik, and Jason Stockwell.

Courtney Taylor (Trent University) received the **Elsevier Student Author Award** for the article "Regional predatory fish diets following a regime shift in Lake Huron," published in the *Journal of Great Lakes Research,* Volume 50, Issue 2, 2024. Co-authors include Ryan Lauzon, Chris Davis, Vicki Lee, and Erin Dunlop.

EDITOR'S AWARDS

The Editor's Awards honor outstanding support of the review process for the *Journal of Great Lakes Research*. This year's recipients are as follows:

- **R. Michael McKay** (University of Windsor, Great Lakes Institute for Enviromental Research) received the **Outstanding Associate Editor 2024 Award**.
- **Brandon Gerig** (University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee) received the **Outstanding Reviewer 2024 Award**.

Pictured from top: Alexander Karatayev, Lyubov Burlakova, and James Watkins. Bottom three photos: JGLR Editor Margaret Docker with Bianca Possamai, Michael McKay, and Brandon Gerig. Photos by Stephany Hildebrand.

APPRECIATION AWARDS

Upon completion of their terms of service, the following board members received the **IAGLR Board of Directors Appreciate Award:**

- Student Board Member **Alexander Duncan** (Centre for Indigenous Fisheries, University of British Columbia)
- Board Member **Calvin Hitch** (Toronto and Region Conservation Authority)
- Treasurer **Lizhu Wang** (International Joint Commission, retired)


Alexander Duncan (left) and Lizhu Wang (right).

In addition, we were pleased to recognize the 2025 conference chairs with the **IAGLR Conference Appreciate Award:**

- **Harvey Bootsma** (University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee) for his service as IAGLR 2025 Program Co-Chair.
- **Rebecca Klaper** (University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee) for her service as IAGLR 2025 Conference Site Chair.

From left, IAGLR President Donna Kashian, Rebecca Klaper, Harvey Bootsma, and IAGLR Executive Director Jérôme Marty.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Michael Back (Kent University) received the **IAGLR Scholarship** for research on "The role of sediment and surface water nutrient cycling across spatial and temporal scales in hydrologically dynamic freshwater wetlands."

Héctor Esparra-Escalera (Wayne State University) received the **IDEA+ Presenter Scholarship** for the presentation titled "Road salt impacts on *Hexagenia* spp: Implications for freshwater ecosystem health."

Abraham Francis (Clarkson University) received the **IDEA+ Research Scholarship** for the presentation titled "Actualizing traditional ecological knowledge within an Indigenous Community from a programmatic and practical perspective within the context of Canada and the United States."

Mitch Kehne (Michigan Technological University) received the **IAGLR Outstanding Student Poster Award** for research on "Assessing the nutritional quality and fate of Saginaw Bay dreissenid mussel veliger" presented at the IAGLR 2024 conference.

Amelia McReynolds (University of Vermont) received the **Norman S. Baldwin Scholarship** for research on "Population dynamics and mechanisms of coexistence between native and invasive forage fishes in large lake systems: analysis of a long-term acoustic and net survey."

Max Moran (Purdue University) received the **Norman S. Baldwin Scholarship** for research on "Ecomorphological diversity in Lake Charr (*Salvelinus namaycush*) morphology and visual sensory system at Klondike Reef, Lake Superior."

Owen Donnelly (Western University) received the **David M. Dolan Scholarship** for research on "Evaluating the impacts of climate change on arsenic and phosphorus mobilization in coastal aquifers."

Julia Akinyi Obuya (Bowling Green State University) received the **IAGLR Outstanding Student Paper Award** for research on "Socioeconomic consequences of cyanobacteria harmful algal blooms in small-scale fishing communities of Winam Gulf, Lake Victoria" presented at the IAGLR 2024 conference.

Augustus Pendleton (Cornell University) received the **IAGLR Scholarship for research** on "Microbial biogeography of the Laurentian Great Lakes at a high spatial resolution."

Student award winners Michael Back, Augustus Pendleton, Abraham Francis, Julia Akinyi Obuya, Hector Esparra-Escalera, and Max Moran at last week's conference. Not Pictured: Amelia McReynolds, Owen Donnelly, and Mitch Kehne. Photos by Stephany Hildebrand.

MEMBER NEWS

Member Kudos

Our members are the driving force of the association, and their dedication and expertise make a lasting impact. From career milestones to distinguished honors, their successes showcase the strength and excellence of our community. We invite you to recognize and celebrate the accomplishments listed below.

Alfred Achieng (University of Toronto) for receiving the Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship to support his doctoral work on "Modelling trophic structure and aquatic food web dynamics in a changing environment."

Margaret Docker (University of Manitoba) for receiving the Jack Christie/Ken Loftus Award from the Great Lakes Fishery Commission for distinguished scientific contributions toward understanding healthy ecosystems. Docker was noted for her exemplary contributions to Great Lakes science, including more than two decades of research advancing new sea lamprey control methods, improving assessment methods, and strengthening knowledge of lamprey biology; for service on many Commission boards and committees; and for editorship of two major monographs on lampreys.

James Last (Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute) awarded the prestigious OLAF—International and Indigenous Membership Award from the International Fisheries Section of the American Fisheries Society. The award provides him with networking and conferences opportunities within the International Community of experts so that he can develop and grow his career in fish and fisheries science and practice.

Jérôme Marty (International Association for Great Lakes Research) for being named to the GEOAquaWatch Steering Committee 2025-2029. AquaWatch is an Initiative within the Group on Earth Observations (GEO) that aims to develop and build the global capacity and utility of Earth Observation-derived water quality data, products and information to support water resources management and decision making.

Michael Shriberg (University of Michigan), a longtime leader in Great Lakes water policy and sustainability, for being named director of the University of Michigan Water Center. Shriberg was associate director of the Cooperative Institute for Great Lakes Research and engagement director at Michigan Sea Grant. He will continue in his role as professor of practice and engagement at the School for Environment and Sustainability.

Submit a kudo

Have a recent achievement, award, or milestone you'd like to celebrate? Let us know! Submit a kudo to lakesletter@iaglr.org, and we'll share your accomplishment with the IAGLR community. Your success inspires us all.

New Members

Please join us in welcoming the following members who joined between May and July 2025. We're glad to have you as part of the IAGLR community!

Ed Bailey
Nikolai Barulin
Lucas Beversdorf
Peter Birschbach
Oluseun Bolawa
Michel Boufadel
Nancy Eggert
Lana Fanberg
Peter Flood
Mark Freeland
Alexander Frie
Edith Gondwe
Maggie Gordon
Rebekah Gossett
Susannah Harris
Terese Herron
Wen Ji
Dani Jones
Stuart Jones
Shahab Karimifard
Daiyanera Kelsey
Dave Kraft
Sergey Kravtsov
Laura Legzdins
Samwel Limbu
Evan Lucas
Charles Masembe
Jacques Mazambi
Abigail Merrick
Job Mwamburi
Sean Neave
Cheryl Nenn
Matthew Odonish
Lisa Peters
Shaili Pfeiffer
Matthew Pronschinske
Ishfaq Rahman
Muhammed Nedim Sahvelet
Shane Shuster
Trudy Wa

Make the most of your IAGLR member directory profile

Did you know that the online member directory is a powerful tool to connect with colleagues, showcase your expertise, and expand your Great Lakes network? To appear in directory searches and get the most from this resource, just take a moment to **opt in** and complete your profile—adding your photo, bio, research interests, and more. Remember—if you don't provide this permission, you won't show up.

The directory works best when everyone participates, so the more details you share, the easier it is for others to find and connect with you. It's your profile—make it work for you!

Log in today and update your information to stay visible and engaged in the IAGLR community.

Sea lamprey control field season underway after delayed start

The Sea Lamprey Control Program in the United States comprises approximately 85 full-time and 25 seasonal employees. The program was disrupted earlier this year due to the loss of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff and a federal hiring freeze. This initially impacted the USFWS's ability to begin the 2025 field season as planned. Fortunately, elected officials throughout the basin worked hard to ensure that the critical work of controlling invasive sea lamprey populations was safeguarded.

As outlined in a recent study (Marcy-Quay et al., 2025), delays in lampricide applications can yield serious consequences for the Great Lakes. Sea lampreys are most vulnerable in their larval stage, where they are concentrated in stream sediments. Without a fully staffed control program, their populations could rebound and threaten both the fishery and the regional economy.

Although the Sea Lamprey Control Program had a late start in preparing for the field season, the program successfully began at the end of April. Currently, control agents are in the midst of a busy field season with plans to treat approximately 120 Great Lakes tributaries. Despite earlier challenges, the long-standing partnership between the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, USFWS, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers remains strong. The integrated control program, focused on lampricide treatments and physical barriers, continues to suppress sea lamprey populations by about 90% in most areas of the Great Lakes.

Background photo: Control agents applying secondary treatments by boat, targeting tributaries and backwater areas that the main stem treatment does not reach.

Sea lamprey larval assessment

A control agent uses a backpack electrofishing unit to sample the streambed for larval sea lamprey, pictured at left.

Lampricide applications

A lampricide application from a state-of-the-art spray boat, used to apply granular lampricide to lentic areas where a typical treatment setup is not feasible.

Sampling lampricide concentrations

Control agents setting up automatic water samplers programmed to collect river samples every hour during lampricide treatment. The samples are analyzed to measure lampricide concentrations, which inform managers of the treatment efficacy.

Feed checks

Control agents perform "feed checks," which is the act of measuring the amount of lampricide applied during treatment.

Photos by Zak Allan
Great Lakes Fishery Commission

Impacts to Great Lakes science, service, and stewardship

BY DEBORAH LEE, Former Director, NOAA Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory

ON FEBRUARY 26, 2025, I celebrated my retirement from 40 years of federal civil service, with the last 10 years as the director of NOAA's Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory (GLERL). What should have been a happy event was instead sorrowful and bitter; late in the prior week, I'd received a list of "probationary" employees who had been identified to be fired; ostensibly to meet goals of downsizing the federal workforce. I was not informed as to who made the selection decision, nor was I given the opportunity to weigh in. The date of the dismissals was unknown, and I tried to prepare my staff for the uncertain future. To their credit, the staff continued to prepare for my send off and made a memorable event. The following day, February 27, eight staff received dismissal emails from NOAA headquarters at 4 p.m., with one hour to vacate the facility.

Aerial view of GLERL

An all-time federal staffing low

Of the eight "probationary" employees, all but one were mid-career, and all but one had worked for NOAA either as a federal employee, cooperative institute employee, or contractor. Seven were female, and one was a U.S. Air Force veteran, another a former editor of the Pentagon's *Stars and Stripes*, and another was a former Peace Corps volunteer. One person had moved quite a distance at their own expense and given up a well-paying academic position. Ironically, all of them had essentially received promotions—putting them in probationary status despite records of high performance and prior service. Hope glimmered when they were reinstated and placed on administrative leave following lawsuits, but ultimately the courts did not find in their favor, and they were again dismissed from service, adding insult to injury.

Earlier, two employees also accepted the Deferred Resignation Program, aka "The Fork" and departed at the end of the month, for a loss of 10 employees. A third wave of departures followed when Voluntary Early Retirement Authority and Voluntary Separation Incentives Program were offered. Another six employees departed by the end of April.

The vacant director's position and three vacant positions that were in the process of being advertised, but cancelled, brought the total to 20 positions. Another employee voluntarily resigned for a position outside the federal workforce, bringing the total to 21 vacant positions out of an authorized 52 federal employees—or a 40% reduction in force—within a two-month time period. The laboratory was now at an all-time low of federal staff since it was established in 1974, with 31 employees. Remaining federal staff, contractors, and cooperative institute employees tried to pick up the workload to keep NOAA's mission in the Great Lakes moving forward, most critically, toxic harmful algal bloom monitoring and prediction, but there were significant gaps in skill sets and no time for hand-offs or training on job responsibilities.

Soon after, impacts to GLERL's cooperative institute staff and contractors began to occur when new rules requiring Department of Commerce and Department of Government Efficiency approval were put in place, slowing or eliminating awards. One contractor retired, two others were temporarily laid off, and five boat captain positions remained unfilled. No captain would accept a position given the uncertain future of NOAA and the laboratory, despite a contract fully funded in the prior fiscal year. The cooperative institute, running on the fumes of FY24 grants, and the prospect of FY25 Inflation Reduction Act rescissions, began two rounds of layoffs in June, prior to delayed Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) grants being approved mid-June. As of the end of June, the cooperative institute has laid off two employees.

Other impacts

Further compounding the ability of the lab to conduct its mission, travel to conferences and meetings were restricted, including prior commitments to the International Association of Great Lakes Research's annual conference and regional inter-agency meetings. Procurement cards and spending limits were greatly reduced, impacting the ability to procure science and vessel supplies and equipment.

GLERL's 50th Anniversary Celebration in 2024: Deborah Lee (Director), Rebecca Held-Knoche (Great Lakes Regional Coordinator), and Jennifer Day (Chief of COMMs) (left to right). Both Held-Knoche and Day are no longer with GLERL due to the downsizing. Lee retired in February.

Funding uncertainty continues

As of late June, the delayed NOAA FY25 spend plan and reorganization plan continued to create uncertainty regarding the future of the laboratory. Although the laboratory was receiving its monthly base funding allocation under the Congressionally approved Continuing Resolution, management was instructed to prepare for a 5-30% funding reduction late in the fiscal year, essentially preventing expenditures except for the most basic labor and facility costs.

In early July, the NOAA FY26 Congressional Budget Submission was released, aligned with the Office of Management and Budget NOAA passback, proposing elimination of all NOAA Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR) laboratories. In mid-July, the Commerce-Justice-Science Senate and House appropriations committees began to mark up NOAA's FY26 funding bills. The Senate bill rejects eliminating NOAA Research citing, "While the Committee could be open to realigning some programs to enhance operational outcomes, the absence of detailed plans hinders informed decision making. Consequently, the Committee maintains funding for OAR programs under their existing structure."

Scientific discovery at risk

The specific impacts of such a large and fast reduction in force are still unfolding. These actions resulted in the lack of resources to deploy the two Environmental Sample Processors that report Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) toxicity monitoring in western Lake Erie. The lab is struggling to operate the vessel-based HAB monitoring program in Lake Erie, Saginaw Bay, and Green Bay, as well as communicate the results to the public. The federal employees who performed

the work are gone, and the cooperative institute employees are at risk due to funding cuts, with the potential for ending the HAB program. Meanwhile the HAB problem continues unabated; this year the HAB toxin was detected on April 28—the earliest the toxin has been detected.

The laboratory's Climate Ecosystem Fisheries Initiative (CEFI) has also ground to a very slow crawl. CEFI, a NOAA-wide initiative, is to develop the next generation of oceans and fisheries models to help predict their productivity and aid in fishery management decisions. Funded by the Inflation Reduction Act, freezing of the funding and potential rescission has essentially stalled development. The retirements of the lab's two food web federal scientists have left one scientist and one federal technician to move the project forward. Eagerly awaited by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, CEFI will be delayed or possibly ended.

With the loss of the entire communications team who were responsible for assisting scientists with scientific publications, media response, and educational outreach, there has been a slowdown in getting science results out to those who make Great Lakes management decisions and to the general public.

A grant that was intended to facilitate the research lab working collaboratively with federally recognized Tribal Nations fell early victim to funding decisions. The highly successful and competitive Summer Fellows Program may also be at risk in future years, reducing training opportunities for the next generation of U.S. scientists.

The development of GLERL's next-generation Great Lakes Coastal Forecast System is also at risk if FY26 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funds are rescinded. The next generation would predict compound river and lake flooding, leading to better flood inundation forecasts, warnings, and mapping. The system also predicts ice cover development and movement and is crucial for accurately mapping oil spill transport in icy conditions. Work has been progressing on Lake Ontario, but has not yet been extended to Lake Erie, Lakes Michigan-Huron, or Lake Superior. One of the federal technicians who processed the model input data, managed the satellite data feeds, and ensured the models ran daily in experimental mode is no longer at the laboratory.

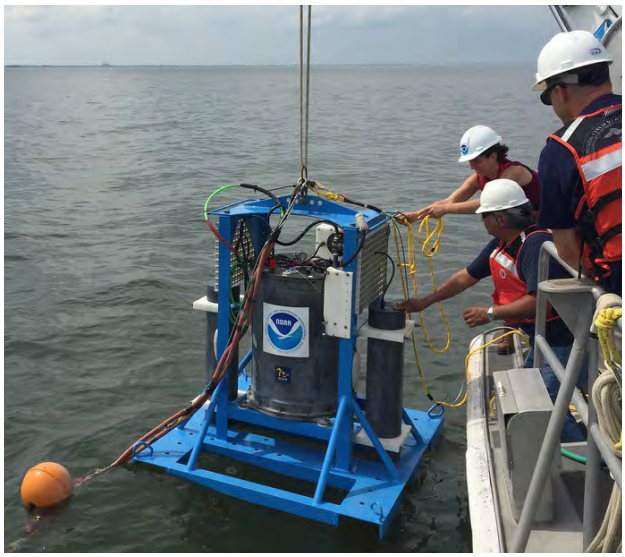
The loss of the GLERL director as the NOAA GLRI program manager, the former federal GLRI program coordinator, and the budget officer, has pushed these roles onto already burdened staff to manage and execute the $10-$30 million of projects annually. Given the high bipartisan support and continuing priority of the initiative, it is unfortunate that, as one of the top three federal agencies executing the program, GLERL has been so heavily impacted. Unjustly, the GLRI program coordinator who managed the GLRI program since 2010, and oversaw $330 million of successful projects, was fired as a probationary employee after receiving a promotion.

Overall, the staffing reductions and budget cuts restrict GLERL's ability for new scientific discovery. If staffing and funding restrictions continue, scientific progress will be limited for the foreseeable future.

Beyond the laboratory

GLERL is not just a research laboratory—it unofficially serves as NOAA's Great Lakes Regional Center. The director serves as the Great Lakes regional team leader, coordinating NOAA's missions across its line offices for efficient delivery of services. The Ann Arbor GLERL facility houses other NOAA staff including the Office of Habitat Conservation, Office of Response and Restoration, Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, Office of Law Enforcement, and the National Geodetic Survey. The facility also houses other NOAA-funded partners such as the Great Lakes Observing System, Sea Grant, the Cooperative Institute for Great Lakes Research, and other collaborating agencies' staff from the U.S. Coast Guard and the International Joint Commission. Eliminating GLERL would have cascading relocation and facility costs and destroy the synergy and efficiencies of co-location.

Impacts are and will extend beyond the laboratory itself, including other federal U.S. and Canadian agencies, the International Joint Commission, the Great Lakes Commission, and the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. Cuts to other federal agencies and state programs, such as H2Ohio, will amplify impacts on preserving and restoring the Great Lakes. It remains to be seen what FY26 will hold for the laboratory; Congressional appropriations will be the final determinant.



The top image shows deployment of the Environmental Sample Processors that report Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) toxicity monitoring in western Lake Erie. The bottom image is a satellite view of HABs in Lake Erie.

Funding cuts threaten early career researchers

BY ABBY HUTSON

Abby Hutson uses atmospheric modeling to study Great Lakes weather and improve precipitation simulations, helping to predict impacts on lake levels, ice cover, flooding, and harmful algal blooms. Photo courtesy of the Cooperative Institute for Great Lakes Research.

A LOVED ONE recently said to me: "Why are you getting so stressed about research funding? You shouldn't let it affect you this much." I love my job, and I care deeply about Great Lakes research. The problem is that I am a federally funded early career research scientist at the University of Michigan, specifically the Cooperative Institute for Great Lakes Research. To keep my job, I need to meet specific requirements within the next four years, including securing external funding, publishing peer-reviewed research, and developing collaborative relationships in my field. Unfortunately, my progress toward these requirements is being hindered by the current U.S. administration. As my colleagues and I experience these road blocks, I realize that many people outside of academia may not fully grasp how deeply recent policy shifts are affecting our work. The state of U.S.-based scientific research is being attacked and erased, and it hits us early career researchers hard.

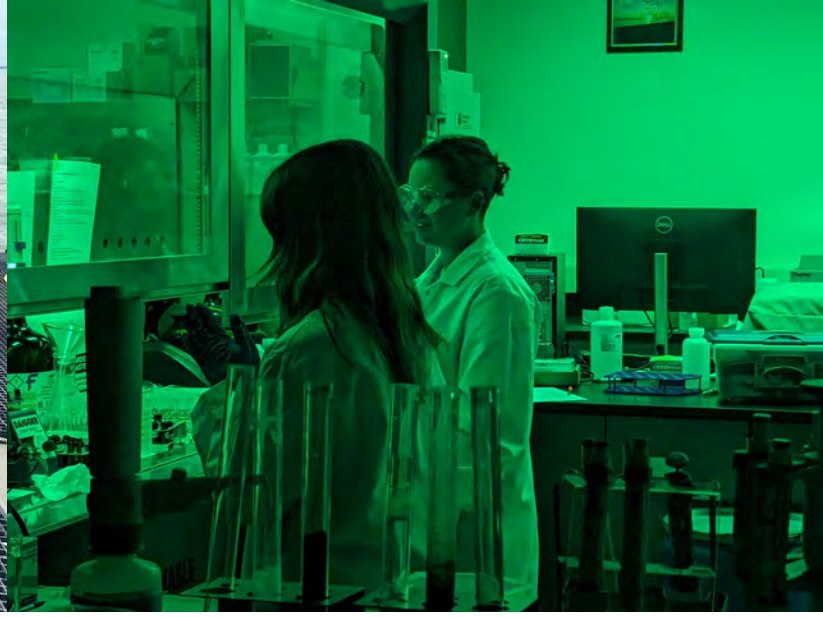
The most obvious way federal actions are impacting my professional career is through funding cuts. In my current role within U-M, research grants pay 90% of my salary. I am responsible for finding funding sources, leading project proposals, and applying for competitive external funding to show that I am capable of being an independent researcher. In my field of research, funding is typically sponsored by federal entities like the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of Energy, among others, but current administrative actions have turned the once-reliable funding cycle on its head. Some previously funded projects have been handed stop-work orders, while others have had awards impounded. Grant proposals in review, which take months of work by the researchers, are stuck somewhere unknown in the process. To top it off, there currently are no open opportunities due to departments and offices within the government being closed, gutted, or completely reorganized. I'm repeatedly seeing that even late-career, tenured scientists are losing and missing out on grants. If they can't get funding, how will we early career researchers get our foot in the door?

Beyond funding, collaboration and professional relationships are another important piece of my career progression. This makes sense—great science thrives in multidisciplinary teams with a broad range of experience. But in the past six months, doing collaborative work has been incredibly difficult. My position at a cooperative institute allows me to work often with federal colleagues, but probationary firings, early retirements, and a significant loss of institutional knowledge have led to a "brain drain" that compromises collaborative efforts. The federal researchers who remain are spread thin, covering projects left behind by former colleagues, leaving little bandwidth to form new collaborations. How can I, even with funding opportunities, form proposals without the co-investigators I need to make them strong and competitive?

I'm sure I'm not the only one who has been told, more than once, that: "You're smart! If you lose your job, you'll be able to find another one." When I hear that, I can't help but feel a sense of dread. If I lose my job due to federal funding cuts, it's not just me—most researchers in atmospheric science would be facing the same fate. We are not talking about one company performing lay offs; we're talking about the dismantling of a critical scientific profession that supports national environmental and public health efforts. The academic job market will become oversaturated, and the number of positions for academic researchers in the U.S. will shrink, leaving few opportunities for new talent. I would feel hopeless about finding other jobs anywhere in the country, let alone in the place I've made my home.

Again, I love my job. Despite all of these setbacks, I am putting my head down and continuing to do Great Lakes research. Not only because federally funded research makes the Great Lakes *safer* by improving forecasting and environmental monitoring, *stronger* by advancing policy recommendations, and *more profitable* by ensuring sustainable industries like fisheries, tourism, and agriculture. We don't do this work for money or job security. We do it because we believe in the Great Lakes. Our devotion to the Great Lakes region runs deep. We recognize its importance and beauty. Above all, it's our home, driving us to protect and preserve it for future generations.

Abby Hutson is an assistant research scientist at the Cooperative Institute for Great Lakes Research, School for Environment and Sustainability, University of Michigan.



At left, Paris Schofield (front) and Jasmine Mancuso (back), both from CIGLR, process Lake Erie water samples on the boat deck during the 2025 harmful algal bloom (HAB) field season. **At right**, Mancuso (left) and Schofield (right) work under green light at NOAA GLERL to process chlorophyll-a samples. The green light protects the samples so scientists can accurately measure the amount of algae in the water.

"We don't do this work for money or job security. We do it because we believe in the Great Lakes. Our devotion to the Great Lakes region runs deep. We recognize its importance and beauty. Above all, it's our home, driving us to protect and preserve it for future generations."

ABBY HUTSON

At left, Rima Upchurch (CIGLR) operating a SEAL Analytical AQ400 discrete analyzer to measure nutrient concentrations in water, such as phosphorus, nitrogen, or other chemical parameters. **Middle**, Maddie Tomczak (CIGLR, front), Cory Brant (USGS, middle, left), Lindsie Egedy (USGS, middle, right), and Greg Faneuff (USGS, back) collect ultraviolet light data from Lake Michigan's lake whitefish nursery habitats to investigate how sunlight exposure may affect young fish during their critical larval development stage. **At right**, Brianna Ellis (CIGLR) filters lake water to measure total suspended matter and carbon, hydrogen, and nitrogen content, which help scientists understand water quality and ecosystem health. All photos, courtesy of the Cooperative Institute for Great Lakes Research.

SP²ARKs still fly

A story of aquatic connections, hope, and voice

BY MOLLY WICK, JULIA OBUYA & ANNA HILL

Despite the SP²ARK Fellows Program cut, its impacts endure among IAGLR fellows

THE CONSORTIUM for Aquatic Science Societies (CASS), funded by NSF, launched the first Scientists Promoting Policy, Access, Research, and Knowledge (SP²ARK) Fellowship program in fall 2024. The three of us—Molly, Julia, and Anna—were chosen to participate in the selective fellowship as representatives of IAGLR, joining 30 fellows from U.S. and Canadian institutions and representing 10 aquatic science societies. The fellowship offered training and networking for early career scientists in science communication and science policy, with the intent that fellows could bring these skills and experiences back to our societies. The goal of the six-month program was to build a diverse next generation of leaders in aquatic science communication.

And that's exactly what the program was doing, until April, when the NSF grant funding the program was cancelled, effective immediately. The Trump Administration offered little explanation, except that the program did not "effectuate agency priorities."

What was gained

The program has had invaluable impacts on us and the Great Lakes already. For Molly, who was a postdoctoral fellow in social-ecological science, the fellowship was an opportunity to expand her network and connect her social science research to policy changes in the Great Lakes. She loved the workshop in "And-But-Therefore" narrative science. It offered simple tricks and shortcuts for crafting engaging, memorable messages, which Molly put to use in a presentation to EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office.

Anna, a master's student studying fish ecology in the Great Lakes, has noticed a lack of diversity in leadership within both academic fisheries communities and recreational fisheries groups. Through workshops like "Challenging Conversations" and "Connecting with Your Audience," she gained valuable tips for engaging with members of diverse communities. By learning how to research her audience and apply strategies for conflict resolution, Anna feels she now has a strong foundation to navigate leadership within her university's program, particularly in her graduate student council.

Julia, an international fellow and doctoral student studying aquatic microbiomes, is working on transboundary issues like algal blooms in Lake Victoria and Lake Erie. The SP²ARK program helped her realize that science is not just about lab work, data, or publications. It can only make an impact if it makes sense to societies we aim to serve. She now appreciates that for her to influence change, she needs to properly communicate her research findings with local communities and policy makers. This program was not just about training sessions but being part of a change, a community of young scientists trying to make the world better, one story at a time.

> "Science is not just about lab work, data, or publications. It can only make an impact if it makes sense to societies we aim to serve."

What was lost

Given the benefits of the program, its cancellation was a major loss. Staff volunteered their time to host the last training and wrap up the fellowship for us. The one cancelled training was, fittingly, focused on equity and environmental justice training. But the loss was not just our own. In addition to our cohort ending early, the NSF grant had included funding for two future SP²ARK cohorts and a SP²ARK Summit for CASS leadership. The summit would have been an opportunity for CASS leaders to see the outcomes of the program and for fellows to work with leadership on the science communication and policy goals of their societies.

The cancellation of this grant and its programs, intended to educate and bolster early career scientists, is just one example of the deep and pervasive cuts in federal funding for science since the current administration came into office. The program elimination comes at a

At left, Molly Wick leading a walking tour of Barker's Island in Superior, Wisconsin. The middle photo shows Julia Obuya (at left) during the NSF IRES Advanced Studies Institute on Water Quality and Harmful Algal Blooms in Lake Victoria, Kenya, which brought together students from North America and East Africa. At right, Anna Hill after completing a science education cruise on the R/V *Lake Guardian*.

time when countless federal science and research grants are being cut, and pathways for early career scientists are being dismantled. For early career researchers, programs like this that advance skills, knowledge, and professional networks are more important than ever. More broadly, effective science communication that outcompetes the rampant misinformation is more important than ever. The loss of the program will only make it harder to create platforms for joint research, or bridge science and society to identify shared strategies for sustainable uses of aquatic resources.

What now?

However, we can learn from what happened in the aftermath of this loss. When the program was shortened, the leadership volunteered their own time to come together to make sure it was wrapped up in a good way. They should have been compensated for their work, but their willingness to do this showed their immense passion and care. It models the care we all need to be taking for each other during this difficult time. The fellowship cohort was no different. In the wake of the news of cancellation, a flurry of heartfelt emails of gratitude and empathy came from participants. Fellows stepped into the gap, offering to facilitate discussions, establishing a way to stay in touch, and sharing opportunities to take action. Now, we have a cohort that is connected to the future.

These actions give us hope that collectively, we can and will find alternative ways to advance and support programs like the SP²ARK fellowship that support early career scientists, train skilled science communicators, and ultimately advance effective science policy. Now is the time to work together to support one another and to imagine creative, new ways to continue to support science that protects the aquatic ecosystems we depend on for life. Even though the funding ended, what it started in us hasn't. The spark is still burning!

"Now is the time to work together to support one another and to imagine creative, new ways to continue to support science that protects the aquatic ecosystems we depend on for life."

Molly Wick is the Lake Superior project manager for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Office of Great Waters. Julia Obuya is a Ph.D. student at Bowling Green State University where she focuses on using molecular techniques to understand and address the current threat of cyanobacteria harmful algal blooms in freshwater systems. Anna Hill is a graduate student at Purdue University, focusing on the early life history of alewife in Lake Michigan.

Sharing Your Stories

Highlights from IAGLR's survey on impacts of U.S. federal actions on Great Lakes science

BY PAULA MCINTYRE

EARLIER THIS YEAR, we conducted a survey to document and share experiences within the Great Lakes research community in response to recent U.S. federal actions. These actions have included the dismantling of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) commitments, the sudden termination of federal employees, and threats to scientific progress through funding cuts and restrictions on international collaboration.

Survey responses reveal deep concern about harm to Great Lakes science—from canceled fieldwork and halted data collection to weakened collaborations. Respondents anticipate the loss of institutional knowledge, interruptions to long-term monitoring, reduced research productivity, and setbacks in addressing challenges such as invasive species, harmful algal blooms, and climate change. "With the layoffs and incentivized early retirements/separations, we have lost institutional knowledge," wrote one respondent. Another added, "We lost 20 years of monitoring overnight." Others expressed concern about long-term effects on trust and partnerships: "Partners no longer know if they can rely on us. And frankly, neither do we."

One respondent reflected on how decades of work are only now beginning to show results. They pointed to the U.S. Geological Survey and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's long-standing efforts to restore native species such as lake trout and cisco, noting that recovery is finally within reach: "We are just at the start of seeing real recovery in many species, and it is sad to see us stop moving forward or go backwards now."

Beyond scientific setbacks, participants pointed to ripple effects on the workforce and the next generation. Cuts and staff reductions are seen as likely to curtail graduate training, weaken recruitment, reduce diversity in the field, and undermine binational cooperation. Others raised concerns about limits on scientific communication and constraints on how climate change can be discussed. Even if funding is restored in future years, many anticipate lasting impacts on research quality, workforce expertise, and the ability to manage Great Lakes resources. One respondent explained:

> With the limitations on what words can and cannot be used in grant proposals or websites and how climate change can be discussed, it becomes more and more difficult to disseminate information. With the way government and government affiliate employees are being maligned and mistreated, it will be difficult to attract scientists to work for these agencies in the future, especially since new hires have been proven to be disposable and targeted for easy RIFs [reductions in force].
>
> With a reduction in funding for Great Lakes research, progress will stall. Students will not see environmental science as a possible career avenue. Graduate degree opportunities are already being taken away. Recruitment to this field will become very difficult in the near future if the pattern of deprioritizing, and even demonizing, science continues.

Responses consistently conveyed uncertainty, instability, and distress. Some individuals bore the brunt of these actions more than others, and the long-term effects remain unclear. With Congress in recess until September, the final 2026 federal budget—and its implications for Great Lakes research—will not be known until after this issue of *Lakes Letter* goes to press. Early signs show pushback in both the House and Senate against proposed cuts, echoing budget debates we've seen in years past.

For now, what is clear is the lived experience shared by those who responded to this survey. While the sample is small and not representative of the entire community, the responses offer valuable insights into how these actions are being felt. They reveal a pervasive sense of professional instability, emotional strain, and disillusionment. Yet they also reflect resilience and commitment—to science, to the Great Lakes, and to one another. As one respondent wrote in solidarity: "I want them to know that their struggle is real, it is not their fault, and they are not alone."

Impacts on people and organizations

Between mid-May and mid-July, 87 people responded to our survey on recent U.S. federal actions affecting the Great Lakes science community. Of these, 71 live or work in the United States, 14 in Canada, and two in African countries. Six respondents noted that their country of origin was different from where they currently live or work—five now in the U.S. and one in Canada.

The survey drew heavily from people with direct ties to science. More than four out of five respondents (83%) currently work or have worked in research. Over half said they "live near or depend on the Great Lakes," underscoring how personal the connection to these waters can be. Respondents also represented a range of roles across the science community: 46% identified as government employees, 40% as academics, and 15% as students (see bar chart below).

Their feedback paints a vivid picture of professional and personal upheaval. One respondent shared:

> I'm one of the illegally terminated probationary U.S. federal employees. I worked in Great Lakes research for 15 years. On February 27 at 3:30 p.m., I received an email stating my employment had been terminated and I needed to be out of the building by 5:00. I was later reinstated and placed on administrative leave, and then terminated again.

The same respondent described the lasting toll:

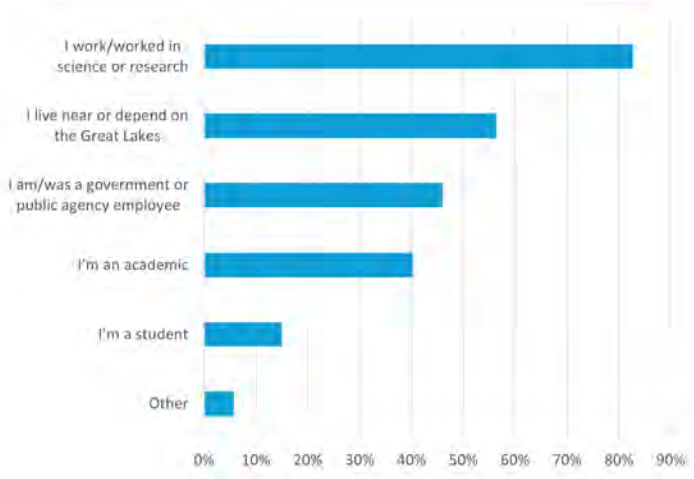
> I don't think I can describe the effect of knowing any email at any time could be the one that makes me unemployed. The email, when it finally came, was almost a relief because I could get on with it. And there was a lot to do—learning about federal employment law, trying to file for unemployment without any separation paperwork, confusion about health insurance, applying for jobs when science funding is uncertain. I found a new job, but I've taken several professional steps backwards in order to continue to work in my field."

Stories like this reflect a broader reality. Nearly three quarters of respondents said they already have been, or expect to be, personally affected by recent federal actions. An even greater majority (90%) also anticipate impacts on their organizations (see pie charts below).

When asked about specific effects, most pointed to funding cuts (90% of respondents). Other top concerns included threats to international collaborations (66%), reductions to DEI initiatives (64%), loss of staff (63%), and the potential for personal job loss (39%) (see bar chart, next page).

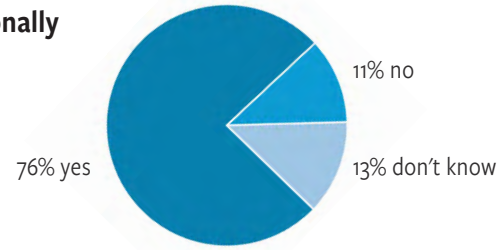
In addition, respondents voiced unease about the wider consequences for staff well-being, organizational effectiveness, and scientific integrity. They cited risks

What is your connection to science and/or the Great Lakes? (n=87)

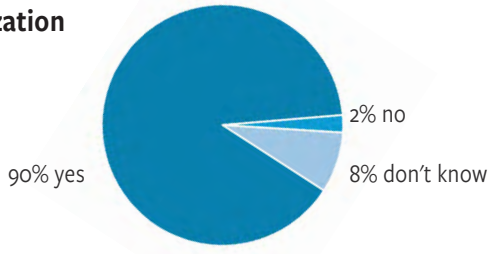


These actions have affected/ will affect...

...me personally (n=87)



...my organization (n=86)



such as loss of data access, fewer research opportunities, weakened federal support, and an overall climate of fear and uncertainty.

Career disillusionment and relocation

Recent events have left some respondents questioning their careers altogether. One shared, "I'm seriously considering leaving federal service altogether," while another admitted, "There is no longer any trust that the work I do will be supported or funded from one year to the next." Many spoke of career paths—built over decades—suddenly threatened by political shifts rather than guided by public good.

Students also expressed deep uncertainty about their futures in science as federal support shrinks. "As I'm nearing the end of my graduate degree program...the current federal level action is not conducive to the work I am interested in doing," one noted. Another reflected, "I rely on external funds to successfully conduct quality research... I require a stable occupation come graduation." Despite personal ties to the Great Lakes, some students are now weighing relocation abroad, where they perceive greater appreciation and opportunity in the environmental field.

In fact, nearly a third of U.S.-based researchers and students who responded said they are considering or actively planning to move to another country, most often Canada. Nearly half reported they are not considering relocation, while 20% remain unsure (see pie chart, below right).

The motivations for leaving vary. Many pointed to research funding cuts, job instability, and limited opportunities in their fields. Career stage shaped these concerns: early- and mid-career scientists worried about losing momentum, while those nearing retirement sometimes saw relocation as a capstone or as a way to make space for others. Other factors included perceived threats to personal safety, quality of life, and rights for marginalized identities, as well as the promise of greater academic freedom abroad.

At the same time, relocation is not easy. Respondents cited strong family ties, reluctance to restart careers, and limited openings outside the U.S. For some, moving remains a contingency plan if job loss occurs; for others, it is more a distant aspiration than an active pursuit.

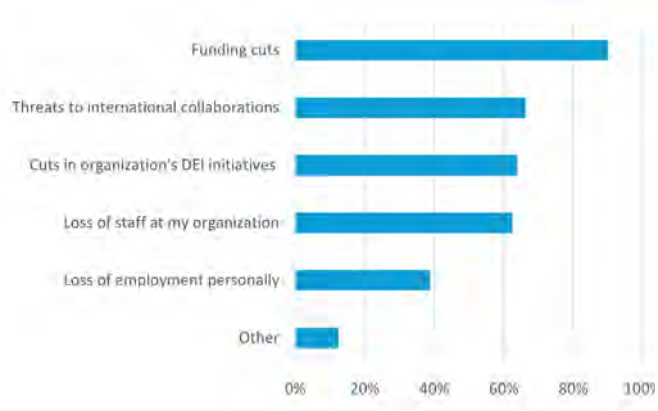
DEI under attack

The rollback of DEI programs was particularly painful for some respondents. "I feel betrayed," wrote one federal employee. "We were told this agency valued inclusion. Now it's as if that work never mattered." The sudden reversals have left staff feeling expendable and cynical, especially those who championed or built such programs in good faith.

John Berges, professor in the Department of Biological Sciences and the School of Freshwater Sciences at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, described the impact firsthand:

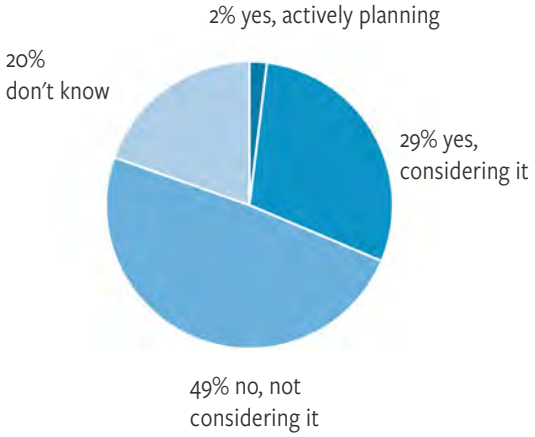
> I was a PI and mentor for two major diversity programs, one for minority students in STEM, and one for students with disabilities in STEM. Both programs

What effects might these actions have on you or your organization? (n=80)



Respondents could choose as many effects as applicable. "Other" responses highlighted impacts including threats to staff well-being, organizational effectiveness, and scientific integrity—citing lost data access, diminished research opportunities, and federal support, along with concerns over a climate of fear, compliance, and administrative denial.

Are you a U.S. based researcher or student considering relocating to another country? (n=61)



> were terminated with no reasonable explanation. This was terrible for me and the mentors and devastating and confusing for the students. The funding loss is bad enough. Silence is worse. There's been almost no institutional acknowledgement, and little public recognition. The local press seems disinterested.

Another respondent, whose work focuses on science communication—"the kind of work that's been smeared as 'woke' DEI and a 'waste of time,' despite consistently positive outcomes"—was not allowed to present at IAGLR's annual conference for fear of drawing unwanted scrutiny that could jeopardize their team's funding or employment.

For many, the loss of these programs directly undermines recruitment and retention of diverse scientific talent. As Berges reflected:

> Much of what we do depends on the goodwill and the generosity of a few really good/special people. We've simply trashed them. A message has been sent and received, and recovery will not be easy.

Emotional and mental toll

Threaded through many responses is the weight of the personal toll. Scientists and students described sleepless nights, anxiety, and sadness. "I didn't sign up for politics—I signed up to protect water," wrote one. Another confided, "I cry at my desk. I've never felt so helpless in my career."

The psychological impact appears especially acute for younger and more vulnerable professionals, who spoke of exhaustion, declining morale, and fear for the future. "It's been stressful for both myself and my friends… many job opportunities in the public sector and indirectly in the private sector are being lost," wrote one student. Others expressed frustration at being told their work amounted to "wasteful tax dollars," even as they faced the prospect of losing entire careers.

While some remain determined—"We're still here, still showing up, even when it's hard"—the prevailing tone is one of heartbreak and depletion.

> A number of colleagues have had actual bona-fide mental breakdowns and needed to take stress leave (well, those who weren't fired outright). I've been feeling utterly sick and horrible since January watching my whole field and all of my friends in it be harmed maliciously by the administration's actions.

Even among students and early-career researchers who remain passionate, the erosion of jobs, funding, and community has taken a lasting emotional toll—compounded by uncertainty over partners' and colleagues' futures.

What scientists want you to know

When asked what they wish others understood, respondents emphasized that the impacts of federal actions are human and societal—not merely technical or economic. The dismantling of research infrastructure, marginalization of expertise, and erosion of trust affect not only careers, but also public health, environmental quality, and scientific progress. Several themes emerged:

1. Personal and professional trauma

Many described the demoralization of watching careers dismantled.

> It was the destruction of a decade of leadership and vision to develop a high performing and efficient laboratory…it demoralized the remaining employees, especially the portrayal of them as wasteful and fraudulent.

Another added:

> Being in this unstable and unpredictable environment makes it hard to get work done and is stressful…the existential dread I experience daily makes me want to find a different job.

2. Misunderstood value and public perception

Respondents wished the public better understood the commitment and value of federal scientists.

> I wish the public understood the hardworking nature of federal employees who are working on Great Lakes issues…the value of federal funding for protecting the Great Lakes and the countless benefits they provide.

Another stressed: "We aren't their enemy…we go to work every day just like them and work hard to try to make a positive difference."

3. Nature of careers

Scientific careers are highly specialized and losing them means more than simply finding a new job.

> When you're a research specialist in environmental science, there is no 'finding another job' like there is in the corporate world...firing and defunding us en masse throughout the U.S. is resulting in hundreds of thousands of brilliant scientists and public servants losing their life's work. It is cruel and it is torturous.

4. Impacts beyond jobs

Respondents stressed that these losses threaten public safety and well-being.

> This isn't just people getting fired, we are losing our entire careers and being told our work is wasteful..the services we provide are benefiting and protecting (the public)—even if they don't realize it.

5. Illegality and disregard for process

Several alleged illegal or unethical actions. "These illegal actions are able to happen and cause harm before they are questioned in court." Abrupt grant terminations are described as "equivalent to a business suddenly breaking its contract without cause."

6. Disempowerment and lack of support

Respondents often felt abandoned. "You are alone in your troubles. There is no coordinated response...to these collective and unjustified administrative actions."

7. Long-term consequences

Respondents feared that recovery may prove impossible "There's incredible long-term value in the science being done...recovering may not be possible due to the loss of datasets and trust."

A university professor's perspective

"When most people hear about grant terminations, it's just meaningless numbers to them (especially those who think this is somehow 'cutting out fraud, waste, and abuse'). What I wish people understood is (1) we are being punished despite following EVERY rule and honoring our commitments to other people; (2) most of the grants being terminated aren't 'radical' or 'woke,' at least not in any way that ordinary people would understand these terms; (3) when grants are terminated in this way, it has a huge human cost, disrupting lives and causing good people to suffer needlessly; (4) the way that DOGE is terminating these grants is completely unprofessional. They didn't think through any of the administrative details, and terminating grants abruptly is equivalent to a business suddenly breaking its contract without cause—most Americans would never tolerate the way this has been handled.

On a personal level, I wish people had some sense of how much of my last three weeks has been a struggle to (1) understand the implications of the termination, when even our NSF program officers aren't sure how all of this works; (2) take care of our people—I have vulnerable graduate assistants, and I've put in many hours trying to ensure that we honor our commitments to them.

On the flip side, people should understand that there are heroes out there right now: neighborhood groups and institutions stepping up to the plate to help."

May 19, 2025

What now?

We asked respondents what justice and support would look like—and how organizations like IAGLR could help.

Justice and support

Many defined justice as public accountability, calling for apologies from leaders, hearings, and explanations for decisions. Yet symbolic actions are not enough. Respondents most urgently called for concrete measures: reinstating unlawfully fired employees, unfreezing grants, restoring programs, and rehiring staff. One respondent summed it up:

> Justice would look like the reinstatement of unlawfully fired federal employees, the unfreezing of previously allocated federal funding, and the restoration of programs that serve all communities in the Great Lakes region.

Respondents emphasized that early career researchers, in particular, were seen as needing emergency or bridge funding, health benefits, and stable career pathways.

Respondents also called for the need for reliable funding from a variety of sources to buffer against federal instability. In addition, they pointed to the importance of sustained access to federal datasets and tools, strong international collaborations, and mentoring networks.

Advocacy emerges as essential. Respondents called for lobbying elected officials, elevating the economic and public-health benefits of Great Lakes research. They advocated for collective resistance tools—legal recourse, society-wide campaigns, and unified messaging—to elevate the profile of science within civic and political discourse.

The role of associations

Respondents are clear about the role an organization like IAGLR could—and should—play. They want the association to be a forceful advocate for funding and policy, leveraging its regional presence and partnerships to lobby for binational and multilateral initiatives and rally support at state and federal levels. Communication is also critical: regularly publicizing scientific achievements and personal stories, broadening outreach beyond environmental outcomes to economic and social benefits.

> Help gain public awareness and support for federal data as we depend on having large, robust, authoritative datasets that we can trust for long-term quality. The public depend on these data even if they don't realize how they use them."

In addition, direct support was highlighted, from mutual-aid funds and conference scholarships to peer networking and resource-sharing platforms, especially to bolster community among early career and marginalized researchers. Respondents urged IAGLR to continue championing equity and inclusion: "Continue to advocate for the value of science, particularly inclusive science, ecosystem preservation, and climate justice."

A look to the future

Looking forward, respondents imagine a future where political and institutional transformation accompanies lasting scientific resilience. They envision new leadership more supportive of science, regulatory safeguards to prevent abrupt "meat-cleaver" defunding, and strengthened congressional and judicial protections that stabilize research continuity. They want regional unity among Great Lakes states to transcend division and elevate the scientific agenda. In parallel, they seek community healing and rebuilding—a kind of "Reconstruction" phase where funding is diversified, institutions make amends, and the scientific community rebuilds with empathy, civility, and inclusivity.

"When all of this is over...I want scientists and their communities to be able to get to work picking up the pieces and rebuilding as best we can," states a respondent. "We'll need everyone's help to recover from what—and who—we lost." Throughout, they urge recognition of science as a foundation of public welfare, transparency, ecosystem stewardship, and civic health.

In short, respondents need both immediate relief and long-term transformation: restored funding, public accountability, strategic advocacy, community-based support, and institutional reform that honors the value and resilience of Great Lakes science and the researchers who sustain it.

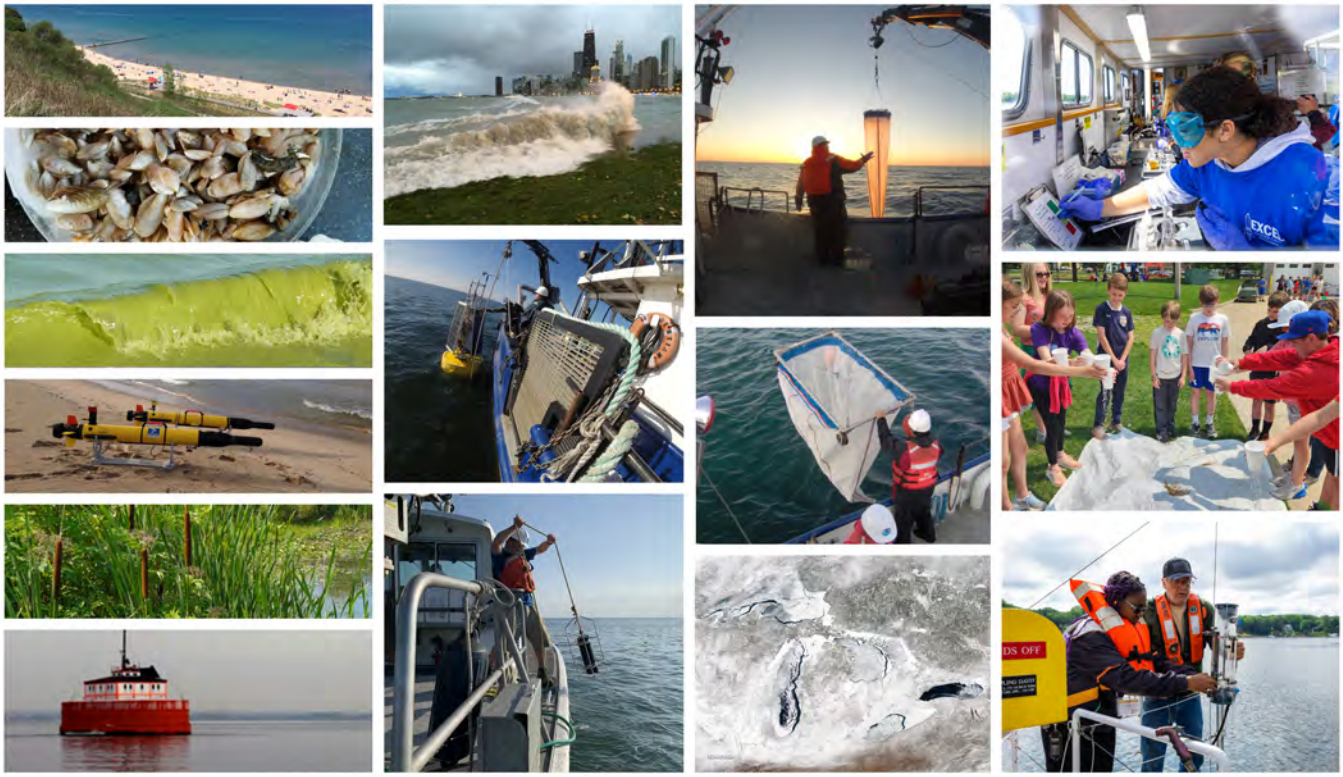
Paula McIntyre is the IAGLR Communication Director and Strategy Advisor. The author wishes to thanks Molly Wick for guidance on data analysis. We acknowledge the use of ChatGPT to identify themes that emerged from responses to individual questions and to conduct a sentiment analysis of these responses. We used the results as drafts to build from and enhance through our own review and interpretation of the results.

Great Lakes scientists unite

Warn of crucial need for federal investment in research

BY GREGORY DICK, MARY OGDAHL & BOPAIAH BIDDANDA

LEADING SCIENTISTS from across the Laurentian Great Lakes Basin joined together to make the case that scientific research on the Great Lakes is critical for the health, prosperity, and well-being of the millions of people in the Great Lakes region. Their commentary, published in the *Journal of Great Lakes Research*, comes as the U.S. has made harmful cuts to federal agencies that monitor, manage, and protect the Great Lakes, and with even deeper cuts to funding of Great Lakes research looming. They write that "reduced federal investment in the Great Lakes will have real impacts on stakeholders, leaving citizens, communities, businesses, and industries without the data and tools needed to safely and efficiently plan development and infrastructure investments, recreate, and operate on the water." The scientists call on elected officials to defend the programs that support a strong economy and the health and safety of Great Lakes citizens and ecosystems.



The images in this collage capture a selection of Great Lakes science, training, education, and outreach activities enabled by federal funding. Photos courtesy of the Cooperative Institute for Great Lakes Research (left column), NOAA Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory (center two columns), and the Robert B. Annis Water Resources Institute, Grand Valley State University (right).

The authors—all leaders and collaborators of the Cooperative Institute for Great Lakes Research—draw on the many success stories of how Great Lakes science has protected human health and safety and stimulated business, industry, and the economy. They describe how research provides key information for dealing with wave after wave of threats to the Great Lakes, such as harmful algal blooms, hypoxia, invasive species, and water pollution. These scientific insights have been essential for developing solutions required to improve water quality, ensure safe drinking water, drive a thriving economy, support healthy fisheries, and restore the Great Lakes to conditions that allow swimming, boating, and the many forms of recreation that the people of the Great Lakes now enjoy.

Federal funding incentivizes and mobilizes universities, agencies, companies, nonprofits, and citizen scientists, forming a highly collaborative network that conducts cost-effective Great Lakes research. In return, the academic, private, and nonprofit sectors recruit and train the workforce, develop innovative solutions, and connect researchers to stakeholders, thus serving on the front line of co-production, implementation, and action.

The commentary also argues that scientific research is essential to meet the major societal challenges facing the Great Lakes today and those that will emerge in the future. Monitoring, modeling, and forecasting are needed to grapple with the profound effects of climate change on ecosystems and an increase in hazards such as extreme weather, coastal floodings, and rapidly changing water levels. Forecasts provide early warnings and critical information that keep people safe, prevent property damage and economic harm, and support informed decision making by coastal communities, utilities, resource managers, businesses, and industries.

Why is federal funding critical to protect the Great Lakes? Can state and local agencies, universities, and the private sector not fill this role? In addition to the scale of resources needed and complexity of the problems faced, federal funding is needed due to the multistakeholder and transnational nature of the Laurentian Great Lakes, the authors say. Federal funding incentivizes and mobilizes universities, agencies, companies, nonprofits, and citizen scientists, forming a highly collaborative network that conducts cost-effective Great Lakes research. In return, the academic, private, and nonprofit sectors recruit and train the workforce, develop innovative solutions, and connect researchers to stakeholders, thus serving on the front line of co-production, implementation, and action. Without federal investment this enterprise is at risk; the impacts could be devastating and endure for a generation due to the loss of the current and future workforce. The authors emphasize that federal investments in the education and training of the next generation of Great Lakes professionals are critical for future protection and management of the lakes.

Past investments in Great Lakes science, education, and outreach have been instrumental in educating and training generations of professionals who have been at the forefront of solving emerging challenges affecting the largest body of freshwater on the planet. These educational and training efforts extend across our K-12 schools, colleges, universities, local stakeholders, and state and national agencies to advance the priorities of a sustainable, safe, and prosperous Great Lakes-based ecosystem. Thus, education and training of future generations of Great Lakes professionals should remain a top priority.

The authors point to a long and successful track record of investments in Great Lakes research paying off in the form of revitalized communities, commercial development, and strong water-based recreation and tourism. Taken together with the potentially enormous human health risks and financial expenses of not effectively and proactively dealing with hazards such as toxic algae, extreme weather, and coastal flooding, it is clear that investment in research is a cost-efficient strategy to protect resources, stimulate the economy, and sustain the unique way of life in the Great Lakes basin.

Gregory Dick is the director and Mary Ogdahl the managing director of the Cooperative Institute for Great Lakes Research, University of Michigan. Bopaiah Biddanda is a professor of water sciences at the Robert B. Annis Water Resources Institute, Grand Valley State University.

A plan to strengthen Great Lakes science

BY TORI AGNEW-CAMIENER, MEGAN MCLAUGHLIN & IAN STONE

SCIENCE AND RESEARCH in the Great Lakes have prioritized remediating past harm, which has led to tremendous strides in improving the quality of the Great Lakes. However, the Great Lakes science community must also be forward-thinking to minimize further harm to the health of our waters. The International Joint Commission (IJC) Great Lakes Science Advisory Board (SAB) is developing a *Great Lakes Science Plan for the Next Generation* (the Science Plan), which aims to help prepare the region and future generations to better understand this complex system and account for stressors to come. As a complement to existing efforts, the Science Plan will propose additional and new investments to fill management and policy-relevant science gaps and needs.

The SAB recently concluded its engagement efforts to support the development of the Science Plan. Efforts began in early 2024, when the SAB held a series of convenings with Great Lakes science stakeholders. Convenings focused on evaluating possible governance models for the final Science Plan; identifying science gaps and investment needs associated with monitoring, modeling, and forecasting; and exploring the establishment of Centers of Excellence and a workforce development strategy.

At IAGLR's annual conference in Milwaukee this past June, the SAB facilitated a final, half-day workshop (pictured above) to expand on discussions from the previous convenings. Over two rounds of breakout groups, in-person and virtual participants self-selected discussion topics such as Indigenous priorities, implementation considerations, training and workforce development, research infrastructure, and governance. Participants shared ideas to help ensure the Science Plan will have broad support and help inform a solid business case that ties science to real-world management and policy outcomes and social, economic, and environmental benefits.

Key priorities for the final Science Plan emerged from these discussions. One key theme is the importance of Indigenous knowledge equity, where Nations are partners in Great Lakes science, rather than simply providers of Indigenous knowledge. Takeaways regarding inclusive workforce development, and the need to better share resources across the region were also highlighted. Of note, there was an emphasis on how future governance of the Science Plan needs to be rooted in clear communication across parties and identified roles, multinational cooperation, and diversified funding.

In addition to these convenings, three Sea Grant Fellows conducted a series of listening sessions and engagements over the last year with Great Lakes communities and Indigenous Nations. The goal of these listening sessions

was to ensure the Science Plan reflects perspectives beyond academic and government views, so that communities and Indigenous Nations will see themselves reflected in the Science Plan. As the original stewards of the land, Indigenous peoples are connected to the land, water, and environment, and their inclusion in this Science Plan is key to its success. Finally, stronger collaboration in Great Lakes science that fosters productive relationships and connectivity among communities, Indigenous Nations, researchers, organizations, and government agencies is vital to a healthy future for the lakes.

"One key theme is the importance of Indigenous knowledge equity, where Nations are partners in Great Lakes science, rather than simply providers of Indigenous knowledge."

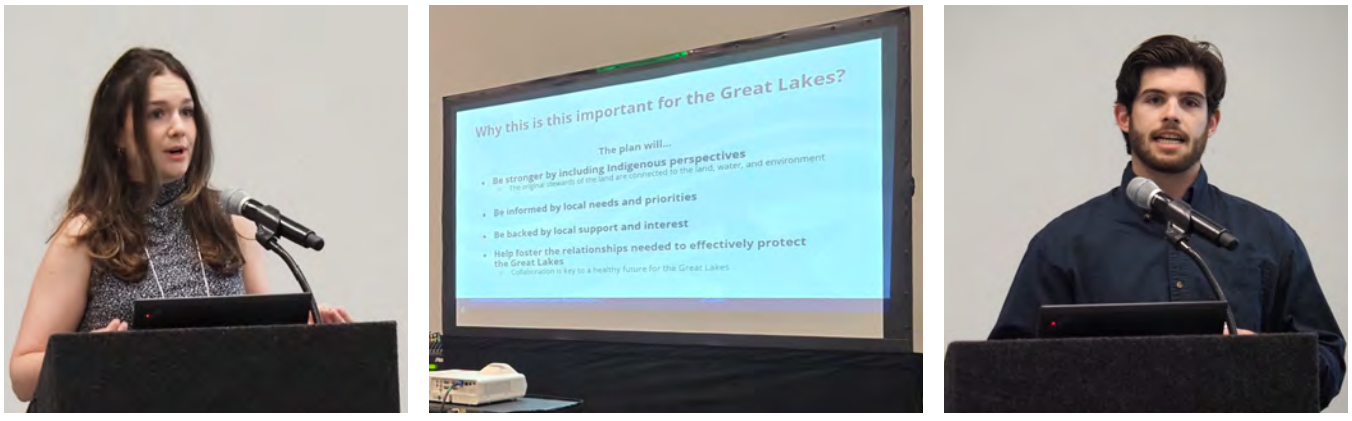
The Fellows presented their lessons learned from these listening sessions at the IAGLR conference, during the "Advancing Resilience through Bridging Knowledges and Indigenous-led Research" session. The presentation highlighted the importance of practices rooted in ethical collaboration and relationship building, cultural understanding, and action-oriented approaches, and the importance of holistic science, especially when working with Indigenous Nations. A key takeaway from their work is the necessity of establishing free, prior, and informed consent and being fully transparent about research intentions and any data that are gathered. In addition, providing opportunities for continued input on research priorities and the direction of projects further establishes equitable collaboration and ownership among partners. Finally, recognizing and valuing Indigenous science as a credible scientific perspective will strengthen future research and facilitate stronger collaboration and scientific investments.

As a complement to the forthcoming Science Plan, the IJC is also studying the network of Great Lakes science practitioners and stakeholders. The IJC has partnered with researchers from Michigan State University to map the network of people and institutions that conduct, use, and fund Great Lakes science activities. The goal of this study is to gain insights that will help spread the word and communicate about the Science Plan, collaborate with the wider network toward implementing the plan, devise a pragmatic governance framework, and help inform next steps.

Over the summer, work will begin to draft the *Great Lakes Science Plan for the Next Generation*. The drafting will be guided by review and input from the project's collaborative of experts, made up of representatives from more than 30 institutions including government agencies, universities, Tribal and First Nation agencies and organizations, and nongovernmental organizations. This collaborative will work to ensure the perspectives and recommendations gathered at the convenings and community engagements are meaningfully reflected in the Science Plan. Ultimately, the final Science Plan will help inform the IJC's advice to the U.S. and Canadian federal governments on Great Lakes water quality issues.

SAB members offer their gratitude for the invaluable contributions of the many partners whose engagement is invaluable in shaping the *Great Lakes Science Plan for the Next Generation* to enhance and protect the future of the Great Lakes.

Tori Agnew-Camiener, Megan McLaughlin, and Ian Stone are all Great Lakes Research Fellows with the Great Lakes Commission, Great Lakes Sea Grant Network & International Joint Commission.



Tori Agnew-Camiener (left) and Ian Stone (right) present at IAGLR's annual conference in June about lessons learned from listening sessions conducted by Great Lakes Fellows.

Reimagining research in volatile times

BY CAMERON DAVIS

RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION are terms environmental scientists use to describe how ecosystems respond to stress—be it invasive species, climate change, or pollution. Increasingly, these principles apply to the scientific community itself. With U.S. federal public health and environmental budgets under strain, researchers now face a challenge of their own: can we practice what we preach?

Scientific research is more than a pursuit of knowledge—it is the backbone of progress. It teaches us from past mistakes, refines our ideas, and shapes better futures. When support for research falters, progress stalls, and the risk of sliding backward grows. The pressing question, then, is not only how science can withstand these pressures, but how it might emerge stronger and more resilient in the years ahead.

Here, the concepts of resilience and adaptation offer a guiding framework. Just as ecosystems need to absorb shocks and adjust, research institutions must find ways to endure today's challenges while continuing to serve the public good.

Resilience: More than bouncing back

Resilience is more than simply returning to the way things were. It calls for anticipating risks, preparing for them, and emerging stronger on the other side. This is precisely the approach researchers must adopt in today's policy landscape.

In my keynote at the 2017 conference of the International Association for Great Lakes Research, I urged colleagues to think *and act* beyond the walls of academia. Publishing papers alone won't secure the future of science. If we want strong research budgets and evidence-based policies, we have to act as engaged citizens, too. Even choosing one or two ways to get involved politically—whether through community organizations or civic action—can make a difference. It's our right, our responsibility, and our privilege. Good policy emerges when decisions are informed by research *and* aligned with community needs and values. This, in turn, reinforces the very foundation of science. Yet unlike many other professions, the research community remains politically underorganized. That needs to change.

Researchers must also reconsider how their work is funded and delivered. In a recent conversation with *Great Lakes Now*, I challenged nonprofits to recognize the new era we are in. To navigate these volatile times, I suggested they create new structures—such as operational arms not tied to tax-deductible donations—for more flexibility. Research institutions, too, should explore similar options.

From my experience teaching at a top-tier law school and helping to oversee a $2 billion Great Lakes restoration fund, I've experienced both sides of the grantor-grantee relationship. I've seen how steep university overhead costs can erode the value of grant dollars. It's time to see whether alternative funding models could reduce those burdens while still supporting world-class research. Resilience, in this sense, involves more than enduring —it requires evolving.

Adaptation: Adjusting and thriving

Adaptation goes hand in hand with resilience, emphasizing flexibility, creativity, and thriving amid change. For the research community, this means continuously rethinking how science is supported, delivered, and applied.

A healthy perspective is key. Instead of viewing budget gains as "good" and cuts as "bad," it is more productive to recognize them as part of a natural cycle. Healthy institutions evolve as conditions shift; those that fail to adapt risk irrelevance. Framing change as an ongoing process helps maintain perspective and builds the resilience that science needs to navigate uncertainty.

Adaptation also invites new thinking about the scale and purpose of research. For example, embedding research directly within restoration projects could generate valuable knowledge while delivering tangible benefits for ecosystems and communities. As a funder, I had a hard time balancing support for basic research with urgent needs to restore Great Lakes ecosystem health. By integrating research into individual restoration efforts—where studies can test project effectiveness and simultaneously collect data for understanding broader trends—science becomes both practical and forward-looking. This kind of creativity can help Great Lakes researchers anticipate, respond to, and ultimately withstand challenges.

Moving forward

Resilience and adaptation aren't just strategies for ecosystems but survival strategies for science itself. By stepping outside our comfort zones, exploring flexible funding, embracing change, and embedding research in practical solutions, the scientific community can weather political headwinds and emerge even stronger. The Great Lakes—and the communities that depend on them—deserve nothing less.

Cameron Davis is an elected commissioner at the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago, vice president at GEI Consultants, and former CEO of the Alliance for the Great Lakes. He served as Great Lakes advisor ("Czar") to President Barack Obama.

Upcoming deadlines

SCHOLARSHIPS

- Norman S. Baldwin Fishery Science Scholarship ($3,000)
- David M. Dolan Scholarship ($3,000)
- IAGLR Scholarship ($2,000)
- IDEA+ Presenter Scholarship ($2,000)
- IDEA+ Research Scholarship ($2,000)
- International Travel Award ($2,000)
- IDEA+ Workshop Award ($2,000)

Applications due November 1

PROFESSIONAL AWARDS

- Lifetime Achievement Award
- Large Lake Champion Award
- John R. (Jack) Vallentyne Award

Nominations due February 1

JOURNAL AWARDS

- Chandler-Misener Award
- JGLR/Elsevier Early Career Scientist Award
- JGLR/Elsevier Student Award

Nominations due January 15

IAGLR

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iaglr.org/awards-scholarships

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IAGLR Board of Directors

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

We're seeking candidates for the following six positions *

VICE PRESIDENT

U.S. REGULAR MEMBERS (2)

CANADIAN REGULAR MEMBER

U.S. STUDENT MEMBER

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MEMBER

View the Call for Nominations

Nominations are due Friday, October 10

* Terms start in May 2026. Student board members serve for two years. The other positions are three-year commitments. The vice president will serve one year as vice president, followed by a year as president, and then past president.