
EMINENT ECOLOGIST AWARD



The Eminent Ecologist Award is given in recognition of an outstanding body of ecological work or of sustained contributions of extraordinary merit. It is the highest honor bestowed by the Ecological Society of America. This year's winner is Dr. William Reiners, who is on the faculty at the University of Wyoming.

Summarizing Bill Reiners' long and distinguished career in ecology, which now spans five decades, is no easy matter, made even more difficult by the diversity of his contributions. Many scientists make their mark in a single field of inquiry, spending their careers mining one rich vein. Bill's career has had its share of identifying and exploiting single, fertile lines of inquiry. As of this writing, he is preparing a paper summarizing a 31-year data collection effort at Hubbard Brook. However, Bill's career is also marked by a long and continuing history of following new or overlooked paths, which has led him to continuing contributions in diverse areas of ecology. He has few if any equals in his history of combining a disciplined, rigorous, analytical mind with an uncanny ability to recognize and adopt novel perspectives to gain new, synthetic insights on ecological topics.

He is perhaps best known as an ecosystem ecologist, where his contributions place him in the top rank of ecologists. Many of the contours of terrestrial ecosystem ecology in 2013 are shaped by Bill's contributions, which have ranged from ecosystem energetics to biogeochemistry to canopy-exchange processes to transport of energy and materials across heterogeneous landscapes.

Bill has also made fundamental contributions to other areas of ecology, notably vegetation ecology, landscape ecology, and most recently the philosophical and conceptual foundations of ecology. Looking at his contributions chronologically, one observes an initial foundation in vegetation ecology and succession, followed by successive mastery of geochemistry, atmospheric chemistry and physics, geomorphology, chemical stoichiometry, remote sensing, geographic information sciences, systems theory, and formal philosophy, with each applied in turn to ecological problems in creative and often groundbreaking ways.

Bill Reiners has published some 125 papers, books, and book chapters since 1965. These include some of the most widely cited and influential papers in ecosystem ecology. Perhaps most notable is the series of papers on nitrogen dynamics in New England forests, including the now-classic Vitousek and Reiners (1975) and Vitousek et al. (1982) papers.

Bill Reiners has played a pivotal role in launching the careers of prominent ecologists. He is a demanding but inspirational mentor. His former doctoral students include Peter Vitousek (Stanford), Peter White (North Carolina), Gary Lovett (Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies), Chris Cronan (Maine), Indy Burke (Wyoming), Richard Olson (Oak Ridge), and Chris Hiemstra (Alaska). He also inspired a number of undergraduates, including Bill Schlesinger (Cary Institute), Tim Fahey (Cornell), and Tom Wentworth (North Carolina State) to pursue ecology.

Bill's contributions also include extensive service to the profession and to the institutions where he has been on the faculty (Minnesota, Dartmouth, Wyoming). He was among the first Program Directors in Ecosystem Science at the National Science Foundation, and he served as a department head at both Dartmouth and Wyoming. (He published some 32 papers, more than four per year, and including some of his most influential ones, during his seven years as a department head.) He also spent a year as director of the Wyoming Natural Diversity Database, and three years as Director of the Wyoming Geographic Information Science Center (WyGIS). In both of the latter cases he provided leadership and vision for units that had undergone recent funding or leadership crises. Both entities are now flourishing, largely owing to foundations emplaced under his leadership.
