



DISTINGUISHED SERVICE CITATION

William Robertson IV

The Distinguished Service Citation is given annually in recognition of long and distinguished service to the Ecological Society of America, to the larger scientific community, and to the larger purpose of ecology in the public welfare. The winner of the 2000 Distinguished Service Citation is William Robertson IV. Bill is currently the program officer at the Mellon Foundation who is most responsible for ecological research. Through his efforts at the Foundation and his networking within the ecological community, he has been responsible for

stimulating and sponsoring a wide range of research among a diverse collection of ecologists, and for developing infrastructure and training programs in ecology. In addition, he has served both ESA and the broader society in a wide range of activities.

Bill's program at Mellon differs from more traditional funding sources in that he explicitly seeks creative and innovative ideas. This makes it possible for investigators to submit "daring" projects, of the kind that more traditional panels would perhaps classify as too "risky" to consider seriously. Bill acts as a kind of talent scout, seeking out the best young talent and trying to arrange for them to pursue innovative ideas. In addition, Mellon directly supports a training program for young ecologists.

Perhaps even more significant, Bill's program has been critical for developing infrastructure and the applications of new tools to ecology. Examples abound, but here are four (in more or less chronological order) that demonstrate the durability and astonishing range of ecological programs that Bill has nurtured: (1) While stable isotopes are now a commonly used tool that, to a considerable degree, has changed how ecologists can study nature, this was certainly not the case in the early 1970s. At that time, Bill decided to support the development of a center for the use of stable isotopes, at the Ecosystem Center at Woods Hole. This center, was, with Bill's help, conceived as an "incubator" for developing the use of isotopes for ecological questions; before that, isotopes were mainly a geological tool. Most would agree that this center has contributed critically to isotope-related studies. (2) Bill provided the support for the Society's first introspective look at establishing research priorities. This investment launched the Sustainable Biosphere Initiative (SBI) and put ESA at the forefront of scientific societies in getting a community-wide plan for the future. SBI has become an integral part of ESA's efforts and is a very powerful symbol of a group that has

its act together. (3) A third example stems from Bill's recognition of the deep significance of long-term data sets. Through Bill's efforts, Mellon funded ESA to examine this issue in an ecological context. (4) More recently, a major example of Bill's role in developing the infrastructure for ecological research is the JSTOR project, which takes the vast inventories of major journals and converts them to electronic form. JSTOR has already become an important research tool for ecologists, and Bill has been the prime mover at Mellon in establishing this program. He has stuck with it along the way, convinced others of its importance, assured funding for it, and helped in the selection and acquisition of journals.

His support of ecological research and education through his activities at Mellon would be sufficient for Bill to be highly deserving of this award. However, Bill has also served ESA directly in a variety of functions: as a member of the Public Affairs Committee, the Search Committee for an Executive Director, and, most recently, the committee to identify journals for electronic archiving.

Part of the reason for Bill's success in supporting ecology in all of these ways stems from the care with which he listens to and interacts with

people. He also has a deep interest in the ideas of ecology, going back to his early training in biology as an undergraduate and master's student in Iowa and Texas. Bill has a rich, textured understanding not only of how science works as an enterprise, but also of the history, momentum, and potential that make up our own field.

For decades, Bill has been almost anonymously working behind the scenes on behalf of ecologists and ESA. The Society has called upon him for a variety of tasks; he never seems to say no. His service is selfless and invaluable, and his energies, wisdom, judgment, and experience have served the Society well on countless occasions. He is exactly the sort of individual for whom this award was invented—one who does what he does because he wants to serve others and help them get the glory. For his service to the Society, to the scientific community, and to the purpose of ecology in the public welfare, ESA is delighted to award the Distinguished Service Citation to Bill Robertson.

Distinguished Service Citation Subcommittee: Deborah Goldberg (Chair), Steve Carpenter, Pamela Matson, Judy Meyer, Bruce Menge, Steve Pacala, Richard Tracy
