

Elizabeth Jester Fellows Award



Elizabeth Jester Fellows was the Director of the EPA's Assessment and Watershed Protection Division until her death in November 2000. She dedicated her career to natural resources management, environmental protection, and public service. Elizabeth was the EPA cochair of the Intergovernmental Task Force on Monitoring (ITFM) and envisioned the creation of its successor, the National Water Quality Monitoring Council. She was a strong and effective advocate for developing a nationwide framework for coordinating, collecting, assessing, and communicating water quality monitoring information and results. Elizabeth was the personification of the goals and ideals of the monitoring Council, and her legacy has been an inspiration to those who have followed her and continue the Council's work. In her memory, the Council has established the Elizabeth Jester Fellows Award to recognize individuals for outstanding achievement, exemplary service, and distinguished leadership in water quality monitoring and environmental protection.

William G. Wilber, USGS, Chief, National Water Quality Assessment Program (retired) 2016 Elizabeth J. Fellows Award Recipient

William G. "Bill" Wilber devoted the majority of his 37-year career with the US Geological Survey (USGS) to creating and leading the USGS National Water Quality Assessment (NAWQA) Program. The NAWQA Program is the largest and most ambitious water-quality program ever undertaken by USGS, with the goals to assess water quality conditions in the Nation's streams and aquifers, evaluate how water quality is changing over time, determine how natural factors and human activities affect status and trends, and forecast future water quality conditions. Although creation and oversight of NAWQA over the years was a team effort, it was Bill's tireless leadership, first as a leader of the pilot phase of NAWQA beginning in 1986, then as National Synthesis Chief, and finally as NAWQA Program Coordinator, that made NAWQA the highly respected program it is today.

Since the early 1990s, Bill has done one-day field trips with 7th graders from Langston Hughes Middle school (Reston, Va.) in the fall each year. Bill says, "During these trips we work with the students on different aspects of hydrology, water quality, mapping, and other earth science topics in small groups. At two streams, the kids collect and compare aquatic organisms. The two streams are close to each other but typically have very different aquatic communities. We talk with the students about the various environmental and other factors that account for these differences."



Throughout his career Bill insisted on the highest data-quality standards for NAWQA and had the program conduct rigorous lab- and field-based QC studies to document the quality of NAWQA data. Bill also made sure that NAWQA was not just a "monitoring program;" instead he advocated that water-quality data, models, and interpretative studies be integrated with national-scale geographic data on natural and human factors that affect water quality, such as climate and land use, to better understand how, why, where, and when water-quality conditions vary across the country. This approach was used to construct water-quality models that can extrapolate concentrations of selected water-quality parameters to unmonitored areas across the conterminous US, evaluate sources of contaminants, and determine the quantity and timing of contaminant delivery to important receptors such as estuaries or public supply wells. Getting NAWQA water-quality findings out to those who needed it, in a wide variety of formats, technical levels, and venues (including the National Monitoring Conferences), was also something Bill promoted and oversaw.

Bill worked with Elizabeth Fellows on the Interagency Task Force on Monitoring Water Quality (ITFM) and was greatly impressed with her passion and willingness to work with others to improve water-quality monitoring across the Nation. One of the major recommendations of the ITFM was the creation of the National Water Quality Monitoring Council and Bill has been a strong advocate of the Council over the years. This includes his support for the Water Quality Portal and most recently, his leadership in helping create the National Network of Reference Watersheds.