Mac McKee retires as the UWRL's longest serving director

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Mac McKee, UWRL Director 2003-2019

After just over 16 years at the helm of the Utah Water Research Laboratory at Utah State University, Dr. Mac McKee will retire effective June 30, 2019. His tenure as Director of the UWRL began in April 2003, and since that time, he has worn the hats of administrator, professor, and researcher.

Education

Mac grew up on a farm in Utah’s Uinta Basin, where he learned the value of both water and hard work. Later he earned his BS (Philosophy), MS (Plant Ecology), and PhD (Civil and Environmental Engineering) here at USU. After teaching at Humbolt State University in Arcata, California, and participating in extensive international consulting work, he rejoined USU as a professor in Civil and Environmental Engineering in 1999, where he has taught courses in water resources systems analysis, water resources engineering, open channel hydraulics, and water resources planning and management.

Research

His research over his career has covered a wide range of water resources management topics, with his recent research focusing on development and deployment of small autonomous aircraft for remote sensing in scientific problems and on the improvement of large water supply system operation efficiency through the use of statistical learning theory and remote sensing.

Leadership

Throughout his career, Mac has used his expertise to advance water management close to home and around the world. In addition to his UWRL leadership, he served in a number of state and national capacities. A few examples are as:

- a member of the Utah Governor’s Unmanned Aerial Systems Test Site Advisory Board, which sought to establish Utah as a player in the development of UAV technologies;
- president of the Universities Council on Water Resources twice and on the board of directors for nearly a decade; and
- a member of the United States Presidential Advisory Committee on Water Information.

International Impact

Mac has been active in domestic and international water resources planning and management projects for more than 30 years. His diverse experience has included assignments in more than 30 countries. Some examples include:

- flood control planning and design (Philippines),
- development of a national environmental baseline document (Uzbekistan),
- water quality management (Samoa),
- integrated river basin planning and management (India),
- advisor to the US Department of State on water and wastewater issues in support of the Oslo II Peace Accord and the Israeli-Jordanian Peace Treaty negotiations,
- development of a comprehensive water resources master plan (West Bank and Gaza Strip), and
- consultant to Amnesty International on water-related human rights violations (Middle East)
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See more in a slideshow highlighting Mac’s career, shown at his retirement event on June 28, 2019

Mac McKee at the 2015 UWRL Year of Water public open house

Mentoring and Research

Mac’s 13 MS students and 14 PhD students from 7 different countries have gone on to successful post-doctoral fellowships, faculty positions at universities around the world, employment in the private sector and international research facilities. He and his students have published countless papers in more than 20 different high impact journals for water, irrigation, and remote sensing.

Under his leadership, the UWRL has gained 12 new faculty; expanded large-scale physical modeling capacity with a new hydraulics building; increased support of graduate students; instituted an internal seed-grant program to jump-start new research ideas; and made substantial investments in emerging research areas.

Looking to the Future

As he wraps up his work here at the lab, Mac is looking forward to working on technical challenges that face UAV-based remote sensing, authoring an introductory text in fluid mechanics, a reference book on remote sensing in precision agriculture, and a historical fiction novel. He plans on more international travel, but this time to places "where the food is good and they don’t shoot at you."

Mac has been a dynamic leader and a tireless advocate for the students, faculty, and staff at the UWRL. Thank you, Mac, for everything! We will miss you greatly, but we wish you all the best in your future endeavors.