

Narrative of contributions:

For the Ohio Chapter of the American Fisheries Society's (OCAFS) Fisheries Excellence Award, we are nominating Dr. Chris S. Vandergoot, who served as a mentor to Steven and a collaborator to Stuart. Since we have known Chris, which spans decades for at least one of us (Stuart), he has consistently made significant contributions to the field of fisheries science through his research, mentoring, outreach, and service activities both within Ohio and in the broader Great Lakes region. While working as a fisheries biologist in the Ohio Division of Wildlife's (ODOW's) Sandusky Fisheries Research Unit, Chris was pivotal in the implementation of the annual monitoring and research programs designed to support Lake Erie's billion dollar-plus percid fisheries. In this position, he also sought opportunities to educate the next generation of biologists, as exemplified by his mentoring of undergraduate students as part of Ohio State University's Stone Laboratory Research Experience for Undergraduates program, as well as by taking the Sandusky station's technicians under his wing. Further, while in this role, Chris became very enthusiastic about acoustic telemetry. In fact, he began experimenting with different acoustic tag and transmitter designs in western Lake Erie and its tributaries during the early 2010s, helping set the stage for what would become among the largest fisheries acoustics telemetry networks in the world.

Chris' efforts eventually led to his promotion as supervisor of the Sandusky Fisheries Research Unit, with him soon becoming a fisheries biologist for USGS in its Sandusky office. There, he continued to use acoustic telemetry to understand the movements of fish in Lake Erie in support of enhancing fishing opportunities and fisheries management decision-making. His passion for and knowledge of acoustic telemetry led him to become Director of the Great Lakes Acoustics Telemetry Observation System (GLATOS), which is a collaborative network of researchers from the United States and Canada that use acoustic telemetry to understand fish behavior to support management decisions. He fulfilled this role while remaining a full-time resident of Ohio, continually conducting telemetry work in support of Ohio's Lake Erie fisheries.

While the work and mentorship that Chris provided was impressive in itself, he was also eager to share his research findings with fisheries stakeholders. Chris was always willing to collaborate with other researchers in the Great Lakes region and was very generous with both his time and research ideas. As an example, he helped Stuart secure both funding and data to support a PhD student on an acoustic telemetry project to better understand Lake Erie walleye spawning behavior and population connectivity. Similarly, he helped secure tags, receivers, and data to support a recently funded Great Lakes Fishery Commission project designed to understand the impact of the Ballville Dam removal in the Sandusky River on Lake Erie's walleye population. Owing to his vision as a researcher, his technical expertise, and his unselfishness with his time, he was able to collaborate on > 100 peer-reviewed papers and technical reports. He also seized every opportunity to communicate his research at scientific, management, and other stakeholder (e.g., charter boat captain) meetings, including those at the state (OCAFS) and national level.

Owing to all of these contributions, especially those centered on Ohio's Lake Erie fisheries, we feel that Chris is deserving of the OCAFS Fisheries Excellence Award. His recent passing has made it even more important that we remember and cherish these contributions.

Dr. Chris S. Vandergoot biography:

Dr. Chris S. Vandergoot was raised in Succasunna, New Jersey. He attended Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University where he obtained his B.S. degree in Fisheries and Wildlife Science in 1998. Shortly thereafter, he attended Tennessee Technological University where he obtained a M.S. degree in Biology in 2001. At the start of his professional fisheries career, he worked as a Fisheries Specialist for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources in Walker, Minnesota. Success in this position opened up the opportunity for him to become a Fisheries Biologist in the ODOW's Sandusky Fisheries Research Unit, which he joined in 2001 and eventually began to supervise in 2013. While in this position, those who know him (e.g., Steven) found him always fun to work with, and he was notorious for his ability to keep the spirits of the Sandusky technical staff high by "being able to solve any fishery issues that may arise."

His passion for learning never ceased. As evidence of this, he pursued a Ph.D. in Fisheries and Wildlife from Michigan State University, which he completed in 2014 (while the Supervisor of the ODOW's Sandusky station). Eventually, his yearning to conduct research led him to the USGS Sandusky station where he became a Fisheries Biologist with more latitude to conduct research.

During his time working on Lake Erie and its tributaries for both the ODOW and USGS, Chris became a prominent figure in acoustic telemetry. His passion for this research was unwavering and ultimately led him to being hired as the Director of the Great Lakes Acoustics Telemetry Observation System (GLATOS) in 2019. He held this position until his passing this past September.

While Chris was well-known and respected in the fisheries community, his true passion was his family and faith. He and his wife had three children; the lives of which Chris was highly involved. For example, he served on the Board of Education at Trinity Christina Academy in Norwalk, OH and regularly cheered his kids on at their sporting events. He instilled his love of the outdoors within his kids, and gave back to the community by helping create the Firelands Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church where he served as church elder.

While Chris is no longer with us, the impact he made on fisheries management, fisheries science, and all those he worked with, befriended, and loved cannot be understated. He served as an excellent role model to budding fishery professionals in Ohio, leaving an exceptional legacy in his wake.