

STATEMENT OF INTEREST

Walker S. Ashley

I am an atmospheric scientist and physical geographer with interests in natural hazards and societal interactions, severe storms, applied meteorology/climatology, hydroclimatic variability, and the application of geographic information systems in meteorology. In the past few years, my research has moved away from examining the specific atmospheric patterns that produce extreme thunderstorm phenomena to, instead, trying to reveal the unique “relationships” that exist between storms and humans that ultimately lead to casualties. More specifically, I have applied a spatially explicit approach to examine casualty patterns associated with U.S. tornadoes, floods, non-convective and convective “straight-line” winds, and rip currents. Through this research, I have revealed geographic patterns of risk and vulnerability that are intrinsic to these weather-related hazards.

Most of my research has examined weather hazards on what I would consider the large scale. I anticipate that through my involvement with Was*Is I will garner the ability to bridge my large-scale analyses with the work of scientists who have examined these hazards and their associated vulnerabilities on smaller scales. Beyond the opportunity to examine these scale issues, I wish to participate in Was*Is in order to address what I believe to be a fundamental problem in the hazard research community – poor data! I anticipate discussing methods and approaches to improve the documentation of how, when, and where casualties are occurring. My lengthy analysis of several commercial and government casualty (and damage) data sources from the late 1880s to the present illustrates that “we” have failed (and continue to fail) in compiling a sufficient database to address the fundamental questions that “we” all hope to answer. I argue that despite the amazing improvement in technology and our ever-increasing knowledge of storm dynamics, we have failed at understanding *why*, in particular, people perish in these events. Finally, I look forward to meeting individuals who have different perspectives on examining these problems and questions. Specifically, I anticipate discussions with persons with backgrounds in geography, sociology, and psychology who are interested in examining human “ecology” and perceptions as they relate to weather-related hazards.

I believe that I can effectively contribute to the Was*Is project through my knowledge and research experiences in both the atmospheric sciences and in geography, which is a discipline that prides itself on merging patterns and processes in the physical environment to human realms. I look forward to many productive discussions during and long after the workshop has ended with my future Was*Is colleagues.