

Statement of Interest
Summer 2009 WAS*IS Workshop
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When I first learned of the WAS*IS workshops in 2006, I was immediately drawn to their interdisciplinary flavor. Five years earlier, in 2001, while working full-time as a meteorologist/forecaster at NWS Albuquerque, I enrolled in a relatively new, interdisciplinary professional degree program in Water Resources at the University of New Mexico. The program is unique in that students come from a diverse array of academic backgrounds; biology, climatology, economics, hydrology, water law, etc. Moreover, many students, like myself, were/are considered “non-traditional.” I ultimately graduated with a Master’s degree in 2007 and it was one of the most rewarding experiences of my career. Not because it gave me an edge or steered me in a new direction career wise, but just the opposite. It quite literally opened my eyes and made me realize more than ever before how effective an interdisciplinary approach can be in facilitating the exchange of great ideas while addressing unique problems. That approach, specifically tailored to weather and its associated impacts on society, naturally attracted me to WAS*IS. I am genuinely excited about the opportunity to become part of this unique program/movement.

Speaking of eye opening experiences, I am often asked if there was a specific weather event, a crippling blizzard, for example, or perhaps a large tornado that ripped a path of destruction through my childhood home that “triggered” my fascination with weather. To be perfectly honest, I struggle to single out any one event, although I recall with great clarity a frightening encounter with a severe thunderstorm on Lake Powell in Arizona when I was nine years old. But I digress. What triggered my fascination with weather, which I can trace back to third grade if not a little earlier, was spurred far more by what did not happen than what did. I grew up in the arid Southwest-- New Mexico and Arizona. I have vivid childhood memories of hearing forecasts of “heavy snow” and becoming so excited that I could barely contain myself much less sleep. Unfortunately, the heavy snow would rarely materialize and, in some cases, the forecast was so far off that I simply could not understand how it could go so wrong. Those long-ago busted forecasts, most likely forgotten by everyone except yours truly, had a huge, long-lasting impact. They motivated me to pursue a career in operational meteorology and continue to motivate me to this day.

Accurate forecasts are certainly part of the equation, but not the only part. When I enrolled in graduate school, little did I know at the time how the new skills I would ultimately obtain, not to mention the people I would end up meeting, benefit me as greatly as they did. The network of meteorologists, hydrologists, climate scientists, sociologists is more tightly woven than ever before and ever expanding, too. That is truly exciting. Extending unique and fresh educational and public outreach programs to all tiers of society is fundamental to my core belief. While I have long been an advocate of using new web-based technologies to improve the effectiveness of weather services and the decisions based upon them, it is the day-to-day interaction with the public at large that truly makes the difference. How do we keep the public engaged? I am especially interested in developing more effective outreach material for, and improving alert message delivery to, specific needs populations including those most vulnerable. As mobile and web technologies continue to advance at breakneck pace, the weather enterprise must remain vigilant at providing world class weather services to all socio-economic tiers. I hope to make a difference in that regard. Thank you for your time and consideration.