My leadership philosophy is pretty much straight from Robert Greenleaf, as he described in his book Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1977). I believe I can only lead by doing what it takes to help those I “lead” be better, be successful, be fulfilled, be <you fill in the blank> that makes them feel good about themselves and their work. By the way, my administrative philosophy is simple – “Hire the best people you can find and get out of their way”. That administrative philosophy meshes nicely with being a servant leader, because my role is then not as a micromanager, but as a facilitator.

My vision, specifically for the Water Resources Center (WRC), then, is about facilitating success for all the constituents and stakeholders of the Center. That is a daunting task, because not all of the stakeholders have aligned objectives, methods, etc. Even so, if the WRC is an organization that facilitates people talking, networking, joining together on proposals and projects, educating themselves and their constituents, whether the public, decision makers, professional colleagues, or students, the WRC is serving its stakeholders.

Let me state upfront that I have much to learn about how the WRC operates, the relationships already in place, and the policies and procedures that enhance, or limit, what is possible. The ideas provided below should be considered in that context because as an outsider I do not, and cannot, know all the details for WRC operation.

Part of my WRC vision has it as a “one-stop” resource for anyone interested in water, not just in Minnesota, but in the US and beyond. That means the WRC must have contacts and collaborations across all the departments, colleges, schools, centers, agencies, citizen-groups, etc. Part of the job of the Director would then be to continue to build those contacts, collaborations, and relationships, so that the WRC becomes the place to contact for information or to be directed to programs of interest, regardless of where they reside. Truthfully, “one-stop” is a bit strong or a bit too idealistic because the other entities’ websites and offices will provide more detailed and focused content, but WRC should be able to get people quickly to the detail and focus they need, even if WRC does not provide it directly.

Obtaining external resources has, unfortunately, become more difficult as funds diminish and competition increases. My vision of the WRC is that it should be an important asset for those interested in water-related funding. The WRC should be a clearinghouse for funding opportunities and a partner/facilitator/catalyst for large grant submissions. The WRC should be considered as an excellent source of panel members for agencies with grant programs funding water research, education and/or outreach projects, as well as the source for quality proposals and programs. Given its own funding programs, leveraging of opportunities, providing seed funding as possible, and just in general being a catalyst for the success of stakeholders should be a foundational function of the WRC.

Given that resources for outreach programs, such as Extension, are stretched, my vision of the WRC is for it to continue to be a reliable, up-to-date source for research-based information related to water. Extension professionals from Minnesota and surrounding states should regard the WRC as a critical resource for their programs. In fact, the WRC should be considered as a part of each Extension professional’s program if they deal with water at all. That will require active engagement with Minnesota Extension and active participation in regional water projects, whether the Great Lakes Regional Extension Water Program, led by Rebecca Power at Wisconsin, or as part of the North Central region of USDA.
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My vision of the the research mission of WRC would be greatly enhanced by coordinating participation in regional USDA research committees, such as S-1042, now becoming SDC358 “Quantification of best management practice effectiveness for water quality protection at the watershed scale”. That particular committee has worked to coordinate and undertake important water quality topics since the 1950’s. I served as an officer when it was S-273 and am currently a participant as a blended industry/university practitioner. Committees such as S-1042 provide opportunities for collaboration across the states and regions. They are especially useful for faculty early in their careers, when career-long collaborations are begun, and when seasoned researchers learn of younger colleagues who can be mentored and supported through the tenure and promotion process.

The Water Resources Science Graduate Program affiliated with the WRC allows for linkage and collaboration between students and professionals. It also provides future professionals with real world opportunities that make them even more valuable to their future employers. In my vision of the WRC, that program obviously needs to continue. It does make me wonder if there can be similar opportunities for undergraduates in programs that apply to water-related fields. The same programs involved in the graduate program are obvious sources for undergraduates, if they have an undergraduate program. Undergraduate programs in Earth Sciences; Civil Engineering; Bioproducts and Biosystems Engineering; Fisheries, Wildlife and Conservation Biology; Applied Economics; and many others look to be likely candidates for collaborative efforts in water.

In general, I take very seriously what the USDA Water Program has tried to do – truly integrate the Land Grant missions of education, outreach/engagement, and research. Historically, outreach efforts in research projects have been add-ons, rather than integrated, and many times have simply been publication in peer-reviewed journals. Education connections have often been graduate seminars. Just imagine the impact the WRC could have if the research was driven by and then provided to those who make decisions about water resources or activities that affect water resources while providing cutting-edge up-to-the-minute information for undergraduate and graduate programs on campuses. What if we reached out to P-14 educators with age-appropriate research-based materials and provided in-service opportunities for educators and then listened to their ideas for next steps and future needs? Dare we expand our thinking to stretch that education continuum from P-14 to P-P, meaning Primary to Professional, including life-long learning and continuing professional education in water topics?

We have worked to break down academic silos laterally, across programs, departments, and colleges, but are there also opportunities to break them down “vertically”, along the age/experience/life-stage continuum? I am probably dreaming here, but why is it good to have an open continuum in one-dimension, but not in the others?

In summary, my vision for the WRC is one of providing service and opportunities for stakeholders across the Land Grant mission in whatever ways possible. I look forward to opportunities to discuss all this and much more.