

The John L. Funk Award of Excellence is the Chapter's most prestigious award and is presented to a Chapter member who makes a substantial or long-term contribution to the field of aquatic resource conservation. Non-members may receive this award, but their contributions must be outstanding.

This year's recipient of the John L. Funk Award of Excellence is Vince Travnichek.

Vince Travnichek has been interested in aquatic biology for over 40 years, since his early days as a biology student at Emporia State University where he earned his B.S. degree in 1987. Vince then completed his M.S. degree at Oklahoma State University and his Ph.D. in Fisheries and Allied Aquacultures at Auburn University.

After many years as the Resource Science Center Chief with the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) Vince switched from Science to the Statewide Resource Management branch on a detail position focusing solely on the 3rd edition of the Fishes of Missouri revision. Over the last two years, Vince has worked closely with the outside contractor (former MDC employee Bob Hrabik) to complete the first complete draft of the book. Under his leadership, we now have a product that is moving to the editing stage with the hopes of having a final product ready for printing in late 2023. Vince began working for MDC as a fisheries management biologist in September 1996 in Northwest Missouri. In June 2000, he became a Fisheries Research Biologist, working out of Columbia on catfish, sturgeon, commercial fishing, and issues related to Missouri River management. With MDC re-organization he became a Resource Scientist, founding the Missouri River Field Station in two locations, managing an annual budget of \$1 million, and overseeing a staff of 25. In 2014, he was promoted to Resource Science Center Chief. Vince has served on several technical committees while with MDC including Missouri River Natural Resources Committee, and Fish Technical Committee; MICRA Paddlefish and Sturgeon Sub-committee; Lower Missouri River Pallid Sturgeon Working Group; MDC Master Angler and State Record Fish Committee; and MDC Catfish Management Committee.

Vince became a member of AFS in 1987. Then, became a life-member in 1988, just 6 months after joining and during his first year of grad school. Vince says "My folks were going to get me a Kansas lifetime hunting/fishing permit for Christmas, but I told them \$\$ towards life membership in AFS was better investment". Even as a young man, Vince wanted to support AFS, and obviously planned to do so for life! This support continued throughout his career, as shown by his many contributions to AFS chapters, conferences, committees, and, perhaps most of all, students. Vince is highly reverent of his predecessors, honoring those who he considered mentors and those that he felt contributed to the aquatic field. He frequently mentioned MDC biologists that he worked with as a young professional, even naming some of his research boats after them! He showed a deep respect and honor of tradition and transfer of knowledge; I think this is why he considered it important to teach and mentor students through student colloquiums, starting student chapters, teaching (he served as an instructor for over 15 years at Missouri Western State University), and mentoring students as well as young professionals (including me!).

There is no summary I can write that will do justice to all the roles Vince has served during his career. My role was mostly to compile the words of many contributors who also respect and honor Vince for his service to MOAFS and the aquatic biology field. Their direct quotes are listed below, and I offer their exact words because they can eloquently describe Vince in a way I just could not seem to put into words. Thank you to these wonderful people who took the time to add to this nomination.

“Vince has been instrumental in nominating a multitude of fine candidates for numerous professional & agency awards. He neglects to include himself in that long list of deserving nominees.”—Margie Mitchell

Vince Travnichek is a name familiar to most of us, as many of us have worked with him through the years. Even those not having the honor of working with (or for) him, know him because of his gregarious and wonderful personality. He has touched the lives of so many through his generous and down to earth spirit. I lack the skill to write anything that could do justice to the amount of respect I have for Vince. I have known him since 2007, when I began working for him as a Resource Staff Scientist for MDC. I, like many people, was intimidated by him, but as a young professional of 24 years old serving in my first “big girl” job, that is to be expected from your first supervisor, but, if you know Vince, he is just plain intimidating! However, over the years, I respected Vince more and more. He is someone I can go to and talk about just about anything, and I know:

1. He will listen
2. I will not be judged
3. He probably has experience with whatever it is
4. He probably has a story related to whatever it is
5. I will feel better after talking to him

This is the Vince I know and deeply respect. I cannot think of a more deserving person for the Award of Excellence, a honor that he not only deserves, but is overdue! - Darby Niswonger

“*“Excellence”* best describes Vince, his passion and abilities, and we were fortunate to have him here in Missouri. I can think of no one that is more deserving of this award than Vince.

For over 27 years, Vince has been a recognized leader within the fisheries and science fields. He has continually and consistently demonstrated leadership, innovation, dedication and a “can-do” attitude for the citizens and the work we are charged with doing. Vince willingly takes on difficult tasks and shows true leadership and professionalism in representing the Missouri Chapter serving in several leadership roles at the state Chapter, North Central, and parent society level. Vince has a servant’s heart with a passion for sharing his vast fisheries knowledge with students, other professionals, and the public.

Vince’s professionalism and leadership in the most recent Department reorganization has exemplified the *OneMDC* approach to the work we do for our natural resources and the public. People are drawn to his quiet style of leadership, and he serves as a mentor to many (including me!).

The ultimate professional demeanor is the hallmark of his work with our employees, other government agencies, non-governmental agencies and most importantly, the public.

In thinking about this nomination, words like: **Expert, Leader, Professional, Teacher, Coach, Mentor,** and **Friend** come to mind. Vince Travnichek has exemplified what it means to be a **Conservation Professional**, and we are fortunate to have him, his talents, and his energy in Missouri. “--Brian Canaday

“Vince is truly one of my mentors. He was one of my first bosses I was just an hourly technician. He always took the time to talk with me about the job at hand, find opportunities for me to gain skills from other professionals, and discuss what my career goals were. If it weren't for him, then I'd be on a very different path in my professional career. He was able to give me guidance on whether or not to go to grad school, as well as be real about the opportunities and difficulties of potential jobs that I was thinking of pursuing. After graduate school, he reached out to me letting me know of a job opportunity he had working in research - an area that I was pretty sure wasn't for me. But I took that opportunity and he took a chance on me and I've been in research ever since.

I know that I am just one such person that he has mentored over the years. I've seen him continually help students and young professionals get a chance to gain experience in conservation through offering jobs, volunteer opportunities, and teaching fisheries management classes. These people that he has invested time in have gone on to work as professionals for MDC as well as the USFWS.

His influence as a professional has also spanned more than just MDC or the state of Missouri. Vince has always demonstrated leadership in his role as a river scientist/supervisor as evident in his involvement with the Missouri River Natural Resources Committee and representing the Missouri River basin states on the Mississippi Interstate Cooperative Resource Association. Both groups having a role in coordinating efforts from multiple states on big river science and management that makes the resource better. He even served as Chair of the MRNRC in his time with the group. He's also a former president of the MO chapter AFS. He was instrumental in helping start the Pallid Sturgeon Population Assessment program and getting MDC involved in this long term effort to recover the species. He was also involved with the Bank Stabilization and Navigation Project Mitigation efforts helping to restore 66,000 acres of lost Missouri River habitat.

Vince is a mentor and a friend. He is widely known by his peers for being an intelligent, dedicated, and caring professional. He's not the kind to crave recognition but he definitely deserves it.”—Kasey Whiteman

To me, true leaders make an effort to relate to those they lead by being willing to meet them on their level or make themselves accessible, so as to try to understand their staff, and to more effectively communicate with them. Vince has always had and demonstrated the ability to relate to and interact

with staff on a human level....as a person, rather than simply as a supervisor or boss. He is not afraid to admit nor show that he is human and he makes mistakes. He understands that staff sometimes struggle, and he provides folksy encouragement and advice. He has “common sense” and often uses it to solve problems or provide advice, going well beyond simply the easy stating of institutional policies or procedures as some administrators tend to do. He also understands and values that we all (including him) have personal lives beyond work, and he encourages staff to have an appropriate work-life balance”. He is REAL, and this makes him more accessible and inspirational to staff. Vince is a leader that staff wish to follow!—Bob DiSteffino

“Dr. Travnichek is one of the hardest working and most dedicated researchers that I have had the pleasure of working with. He has an excellent background in big river fisheries ecology and has been a valuable asset in using his expertise to help MDC work through several contentious issues such as: commenting on a complicated Federal Energy Regulatory Commission license for Bagnell Dam on the Osage River in Missouri, sturgeon / caviar regulations for the Missouri and Mississippi rivers and pallid sturgeon work on the Missouri River. He has also been coordinator of the commercial fishing program and has dealt the a number of big river research projects such as paddlefish, Mo River shallow water habitat for larval and juvenile fishes, a flathead catfish exploitation and movement study, a sturgeon monitoring and an Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Program for the Missouri River. Dr. Travnichek has an excellent background in fish population dynamics and modeling. Most of his research projects involve a collaborative effort with universities (e.g. Northwest Missouri State and University of Missouri), other state and federal agencies (EPA, FWS, COE) and our fisheries and wildlife management biologists and resource scientists in our department. He has a strong background in hydrological science working with instream flow issues associated with the Missouri and Osage rivers.”---Ron Dent

“Vince serves as the Resource Science Center Chief in Columbia. Vince was nominated for this award for his willingness to step up and help others above and beyond his regular duties and commitments. As we prepared for the summer regional meetings, including the idea of providing lunch for all staff in each region, Vince proactively stepped up and volunteered to handle everything, including coordination of supplies and securing teams to cook the meals. Vince also took it one step further to cover all of the special dietary requests/needs from staff. Out of the nine meetings, Vince only missed one, which was for grouse trapping that was previously scheduled before the regional meetings.

This was shared about Vince in his nomination: “To volunteer for such a huge task that spanned over two months, serving all department staff, all while keeping a great attitude, directing staff on what they needed to do, and volunteering for future events if/when needed, means a lot to me. In my almost 20 years at MDC, I have had many opportunities to meet and work with some amazing and generous people. Vince takes the cake!”—From his October 2019 “MDC Employee of the Month” email announcement