

A Stephen Weithman, Jr. Leadership Award- Eric Rahm, Missouri Department of Conservation.

Back in the year 2000, The Missouri Chapter of the American Fisheries Society authored a proclamation renaming the Chapter's leadership award after Steve Weithman. Steve served two terms as MOAFS President, led the fisheries profession in the field of socio-economics, acted as financial advisor to the Chapter, and most importantly- stood firm in his convictions to protect the aquatic resources of the state of Missouri. It is my pleasure to present this year's award to Eric Rahm, for upholding the standard of leadership Steve Weithman established.

Eric began his career in high school, developing an independent research project on aggression levels between invasive and native crayfish that would subsequently be published. Eric worked with the Missouri Department of Conservation through college, as a fisheries technician with Vince Travnicek, conducting mussel surveys with Steve McMurray, and on the crayfish crew with Bob DiStefano. He completed a Bachelor's degree at Central Methodist University, and studied freshwater mussel ecology at Tennessee Tech University. Eric spent three years working with Ecological Specialists as a malacologist, and in 2011, became a Streams Biologist with the Missouri Department of Conservation.

Eric has developed into one of the state's foremost experts on stream-related issues. He is integral in training MDC staff and other resource professionals through the Streams 101 course for many years. Many of us have taken that course and benefited from the expertise of Eric and Streams Unit. Eric has been a staunch advocate for aquatic organism passage (AOP) working with groups such as MODOT, FEMA, county governments, Missouri DNR, The Nature Conservancy, Missouri citizens, and many others to inform and educate people on why Aquatic Organism Passage matters. His efforts are a shining example of creating great partnerships by meeting the needs of all involved. Time and again Eric has negotiated to provide reliable transportation AND aquatic organism passage, benefitting aquatic organisms as well as the stakeholders. These efforts' benefits will be realized for years to come.

Eric represented MDC at the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC), learning about the Bipartisan Infrastructure Program. These efforts give MDC the leading edge for funding and other support opportunities for removing AOP barriers. Eric took it upon himself to begin sharing Missouri AOP barrier information with SARP (Southeastern Aquatic Resources Partnership) so that our State may be eligible for more resources to continue to eliminate aquatic barriers. This diverse team will bring together stakeholders from all over the state to tackle aquatic connectivity issues in an inclusive and organized way. Missouri is one of the last states in the southeast to develop such a team and it was Eric who saw the need and has put in the effort to make it happen. This will be a

huge step in the right direction for addressing Aquatic Organism Passage issues in Missouri.

Eric organized and assumed the role of Aquatic Connectivity Team Lead for Missouri and has pulled in partners from across Missouri and other states to collaborate on securing resources, learning from the work of surrounding states, and bringing awareness to stream connectivity issues. He meets regularly with this group and recently hosted Missouri's first Aquatic Connectivity Team meeting in Jefferson City.

In addition to his AOP work, Eric continuously mentors both permanent and hourly staff on watershed and stream issues and provides excellent technical assistance to landowner experiencing stream related difficulties.

That's a lot- and Eric still makes time to be involved with the Missouri Chapter. Eric joined MOAFS in 2004, despite not having a Student Subunit at Central Methodist, and would attend FASS meetings at Mizzou. Eric's long experience with MOAFS, specifically EXCOM made him the go-to person for more recent officers looking for advice. Eric also regularly contributes in the MOAFS business meetings, MOAFS booth at MNRC, and behind the scenes in numerous email exchanges. He has led or assisted with many fundraising efforts, raising money for scholarships and other student support endeavors.

Eric has served the chapter as Chair of the Rivers and Streams Committee, as MOAFS President, and as our Liaison and representative with the Conservation Federation of Missouri. Eric has helped plan the Freshwater Mollusk Conservation Society annual meeting, as well as AFS National, SEAFWA, and MNRC.

Eric, along with Kat Lackman, has also played a critical role in developing and distributing the Fishes of Missouri Posters. Eric volunteered to figure out the financials behind the posters, develop prices, help with advertising, and has been the primary person distributing posters that were ordered in-person or on-line. Not only has Eric's work made a significant financial contribution to the Missouri Chapter, these posters are being used as an resource by Student Subunits and educators throughout the state.

Eric has an exhaustive work ethic, attention to detail, leadership skills, and has contributed extensively to the protection and stewardship of Missouri's aquatic resources. It is my honor to thank Eric for his contributions, and to present to him the A. Stephen Weithman Leadership Award.