



WATER CENTER
The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

OU WaTER SYMPOSIUM

6:30–9 p.m., Wednesday, September 9, 2026

The National Weather Center Atrium

120 David L. Boren Blvd.

Norman, Oklahoma

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON WATER RESILIENCE

Water Prize 20

AGENDA

Welcome from WaTER Center

Randall Kolar, Ph.D.

Director, WaTER Center; Director, School of Civil Engineering and Environmental Science

Welcome from National Weather Center

Robert Palmer, Ph.D.

*Dean, College of Atmospheric and Geographic Sciences;
Director, National Weather Center*

Opening Remarks

John Klier, Ph.D.

Dean, Gallogly College of Engineering

Introduction of Jurors

Yang Hong, Ph.D., and Robert Nairn, Ph.D.

WaTER Center Directors, Professors, School of Civil Engineering and Environmental Science

Dinner Served

Juror Presentations

Brief presentation from each juror about his/her past or ongoing water-related work

Juror Panel Discussions

Jason Vogel, Ph.D.

OU Water Prize Jurors and Moderator

Overview of critical water issues in today's world with an emphasis on emerging regions

Prize Announcement

Randa Shehab, Ph.D. and Juror

2027 University of Oklahoma International Water Prize winner announcement

Closing Remarks

James Chamberlain, Ph.D.

Faculty, School of Civil Engineering and Environmental Science

GLOBAL WATER FACTS

Water is essential to life. Water security means having reliable access to sufficient quantities of water of suitable quality to support human health and well-being while managing water-related risks to people, the environment, and economies. Climate change is intensifying water-related challenges, including droughts, floods, and other hydrologic extremes, while increasing uncertainty about the availability and quality of water resources. Despite decades of economic prosperity and technological advancement, access to safe water and sanitation remains a major global challenge. According to the latest World Health Organization and UNICEF estimates, approximately 2.1 billion people lacked safely managed drinking-water services in 2024, while 3.4 billion lacked safely managed sanitation services. An estimated 1.7 billion people also lacked basic hygiene services at home. These staggering numbers underscore the continuing need for innovative, equitable, and sustainable approaches to water challenges around the world.

JURORS AND SYMPOSIUM PANELISTS



PHILIP DEAL

Oklahoma Christian University

Philip Deal, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in Mechanical Engineering at Oklahoma Christian

University. He and his wife, Brenda, have three beautiful daughters, Lieselotte, Esther, and Elizabeth, and live right here in the Oklahoma City metro. Dr. Deal holds a PhD in Civil Engineering from the University of Oklahoma with research focused on the sustainability and operations of rural water supply. He has over a decade of experience working with over 35 water service providers across sub-Saharan Africa. He previously held leadership roles within Water4 and NUMA, where he worked with all aspects of the business to streamline operations, including construction, utility maintenance, sales and marketing, and finance. The business is now serving over 1 million customers in 4 countries each day with safe, reliable, and convenient piped water supply. Dr. Deal continues to work part-time in WASH as the Managing Director of UpFlow. The company partners with water service providers to develop scalable strategies, empower local leaders, and deliver operational excellence to their customers.



STYVERS KATHUNI

Millennium Water Alliance

Styvers Kirimi Kathuni has over 17 years of experience leading complex, high-value water security and resilience

programs across Africa. He currently serves as Country Director for the Millennium Water Alliance in Kenya, where he leads the Resilience Think and Do Tank Project, funded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and a water security program funded by the Coca-Cola Foundation. Previously, he served as Chief of Party on two USAID-funded water security programs and led the Swiss-funded RAPID+ Program in Kenya. Before joining MWA, he was Regional Director at SweetSense Africa (now Virridy), where he oversaw the installation of over 500 water point monitoring sensors. Earlier in his career, with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in South Sudan, he led WASH activities under a USAID-funded program, and as Team Leader for CRS in Kenya, he oversaw integrated development programs in the country's arid and semi-arid regions. Mr. Kathuni holds a master's degree in Water Supply and Sanitation from Kenyatta University and an undergraduate degree in Water and Environmental Engineering from Egerton University. He is currently pursuing a PhD in Civil Engineering at the University of Colorado, Boulder, where he has also been a Fellow at the Mortenson Center for Global Engineering and Resilience for the past four years. Having contributed to programs that have collectively provided access to safe water for over 1.5 million people, he is passionate about advancing sustainable, market-oriented solutions for rural water supply systems.



ALI MIRCHI

Oklahoma Water Resources Center

Ali Mirchi, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Water Resources Engineering in the Department of Biosystems

and Agricultural Engineering and serves as the Associate Director of the Oklahoma Water Resources Center at Oklahoma State University (OSU). His interdisciplinary water resources research program and outreach efforts have guided water policies and management interventions to support sustainable food, feed, and fiber production amid mounting challenges posed by urbanization, irrigation expansion, fragile ecosystems, and hydrologic intensification. His work has facilitated dialogues among traditional disciplines of engineering, hydrology, water resources management, climatology, ecology, soil sciences, agronomy, social sciences, environmental policy, and economics, while engaging a diverse array of water resources decision-makers, practitioners, and civil society communities in the US and internationally. Dr. Mirchi has received OSU's Ferguson College of Agriculture's James A. Whatley Award for Meritorious Research in Agricultural Sciences, the American Water Resources Association's Icko Iben Multidisciplinary Communications Award, and the early-career and mid-career awards for applied research from the Universities Council on Water Resources. He holds a PhD in civil engineering from Michigan Technological University, a Master's in water resources engineering from Lund University, and a BS in civil engineering—water resources from the University of Tabriz.

JURORS AND SYMPOSIUM PANELISTS



CHARITIE ROPATI

Youth Climate Justice Fund

Charitie Ropati (Yup'ik & Samoan) is an Indigenous climate justice advocate, Scientist, and Water Engineer.

She has worked on building pipe infrastructure and water infrastructure for rural Alaska Native communities. She is originally from the Native Village of Kongiganak, Alaska, a small coastal community in the Southwest region of Alaska and Anchorage, Alaska. Charitie is a recent graduate from the School of Engineering at Columbia University and holds a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering on the Water Resources track, and concentrations in Earth and Environmental Engineering & Anthropology. She was awarded Champion for Change by the Center for Native American Youth for her work in education & climate and has been recognized by the World Wildlife Fund as a Conservation Leadership Awardee. She has also keynoted at the UNECOSOC Partnership Forum at the United Nations Headquarters on behalf of her Arctic community. She continues to fight for Indigenous human rights, advocating for the protection of land, water, and sovereignty. She currently works as a Water Engineer and is the North America Regional Facilitator for the Youth Climate Justice Fund. She is also part of the United Nations Women's Leader Initiative. Most recently, she was featured on the 2025 Forbes 30 Under 30 List, under Education for her work, and she received the 2025 Muhammad Ali Humanitarian Award.



ABHISHEK ROYCHOWDHURY

Bentley University

Abhishek RoyChowdhury, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Natural and Applied Sciences at Bentley University. His research expertise

lies in the field of environmental clean-up and remediation with special emphasis on abandoned mine site remediation, water and wastewater treatment, installation of water filtration units in Indigenous communities, and development of environmental-friendly "green" approaches for treatment of heavy metals from contaminated soil and water. All his ongoing projects are community centric applied research. Dr. RoyChowdhury is a water rights advocate actively addressing environmental justice issues in the largest Native American Tribe in the U.S., the Navajo Nation, where thirty percent of the residents do not have access to clean running water. His research team is currently installing community level water filtration units in Navajo communities. He is also involved in advancing STEM education and workforce development in the Indigenous communities. Dr. RoyChowdhury received over \$14 million in grants from several federal sources including NSF, NASA, USDOE, USDA, and USDOL; and non-federal sources including First Americans Land-Grant Consortium, and Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. For his work Dr. RoyChowdhury has received the American Society of Reclamation Science (ASRS)'s 2022 Early Career Award, American Academy of Environmental Engineers and Scientists (AAEES)'s 2022 40 Under 40 Rising Star Award, Albuquerque Business First 2022 40 Under 40 Award (For the State of New Mexico), and recognition from the New Mexico State Senate Fifty-Fifth Legislature (2022), among many others. In 2023, he was named an USDA Terra Preta do Indio Tribal Science Fellow.

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STRATEGIC PLAN AND WATER PRIZE

The goal of the University of Oklahoma WaTER Center is to promote peace by advancing health, education and economic development through sustainable water and sanitation solutions for impoverished regions. The center seeks to be a premier academic leader in responding to water-related United Nations Sustainable Development Goals through the following focused activities:

Education – Unique WaTER classes, interdisciplinary courses with WaTER relevance, and a WaTER minor: “Water and Sanitation for Health and Sustainable Development”

Research – Undergraduate and graduate research in sustainable WaTER technologies (e.g., arsenic/fluoride treatment, climate change/water resources, wetlands for mine-impacted waters, water reuse, and assessment of sanitation interventions)

Outreach – Students and local community, Sooners Without Borders chapter (service learning), K-12 educational outreach, guest speakers

International Leadership – University of Oklahoma International Water Prize, WaTER Symposium, and WaTER Colloquium

THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA INTERNATIONAL WATER PRIZE

The purpose of the OU International Water Prize is to recognize and honor an individual who has made significant international contributions, either through research, teaching or service activities, in the field of water supply, sanitation and water security with a focus on emerging regions.

The prize, first awarded in 2009, is a biennial award sponsored by the OU WaTER Center and made possible by the OU President’s Office and generous gifts from alumni and friends. The recipient receives a \$25,000 cash award and an original hand-blown glass-trophy, and delivers the plenary lecture at the biennial WaTER Colloquium. This is one of the first and largest prizes dedicated to the field of water security in emerging regions.

OU INTERNATIONAL WATER PRIZE RECIPIENTS



STEPHEN P. LUBY
2009

Stephen Luby, M.D., worked for the International Centre for Diarrheal Disease Research, Bangladesh, from 2004 until 2012 as head of the Program on Infectious Diseases and Vaccine Sciences. He currently serves as research deputy director for the Center for Innovation in Global Health at Stanford University.



BEN FAWCETT
2011

Ben Fawcett is an adjunct senior lecturer at the University of Queensland, Australia, teaching at the International Water Centre on sanitation, hygiene and water supply for developing countries. In 2008, he coauthored the book, *The Last Taboo: Opening the Door on the Global Sanitation Crisis*. He served as a mentor at Southampton University from 1996–2006 for more than 130 master of science and doctoral students.



ADA OKO-WILLIAMS
2013

Ada Oko-Williams is assistant director at the Sustainable and Thriving Environments for West Africa Regional Development program. She served as the associate director for Sanitation at Water and Sanitation for Africa in Burkina Faso from 2012 to 2013 and was a coordinator at the West African Regional Learning Centre on Sanitation, 2008–2012.



PETER LOCHERY
2015

Environmental engineer Peter Lochery is the director of the Water Team of CARE. He expanded CARE's Water Team strategies to include action, learning, partnership and advocacy. Lochery currently serves on the board of Building Partnerships for Development in Water and Sanitation, Water Advocates and the Millennium Water Alliance, of which he was a founding father.

OU INTERNATIONAL WATER PRIZE RECIPIENTS



ERIC STOWE

2017

Eric Stowe is the Founder and CEO of Splash. Splash's work focuses extensively on bringing the resources of public, private and social sectors to serve the largest and poorest cities. Since 2007, Stowe's NGO has been spearheading a new model for international development—one that challenges the way the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector thinks about transparency, philanthropy, collaboration and impact.



MARTHA GEBEYEHU

2019

Martha Gebeyehu is the coordinator for Ethiopia's Water Expertise and Training Center. She was the first water quality analyst for the Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church Development Commission, where she developed a laboratory, began implementing safe testing practices, and started the first water quality workshops. Gebeyehu is on the front lines of bringing clean water and sanitation to all.



DAWN MARTIN-HILL

2022

Dawn Martin-Hill, Ph.D., is an Indigenous (Haudenosaunee) woman, a cultural anthropologist, and an associate professor at McMaster University. Using grants from the Global Water Futures, she and her students examine the sources of water contamination in both Six Nations and the Lubicon Cree in Alberta. They have developed indigenous water quality tools to monitor and assess the rich water life that surrounds them. Martin-Hill's passion is her commitment to studying and improving the health impacts of water quality on people and animals that live in both communities.



HIMANSHU KULKARNI

2025

Himanshu Kulkarni, Ph.D., is the Founder Trustee, Former Executive Director and Scientist Emeritus with the Advanced Center for Water Resources Development and Management (ACWDAM). He is also associated with three leading academic institutions in India. He has dedicated his professional career to aquifers and community action across India's groundwater typology for over forty-two years. He has held advisory positions on various committees of the Government, apart from anchoring many action-research collaborations on groundwater including international programs.

ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Yang Hong, Ph.D.

CEES Professor and Director of Hydrology and Water Security

Palista Kharel, MBA, MPPA

Executive Director, WaTER Center

Robert Knox, Ph.D., P.E.

CEES Professor

Randall Kolar, Ph.D., P.E.

CEES Director and Professor

Robert Nairn, Ph.D., BCES

CEES Professor and CREW Director

David Sabatini, Ph.D., P.E., BCEE

CEES Professor Emeritus and Center Founder

Jason Vogel, Ph.D., P.E.

CEES Professor and OWS Director

Donna Wylie

WaTER Center Staff Assistant

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WaTER Center Co-Directors with the 2025 OU International WaTER Colloquium panelists



David Sabatini, founder of the OU WaTER Center

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