

Ecosystem Health: The Concept, the ISEH, and the Important Tasks Ahead

1. D.J. Rapport¹,
2. G. Böhm²,
3. D. Buckingham³,
4. J. Cairns Jr.⁴,
5. R. Costanza⁵,
6. J.R. Karr⁶,
7. H.A.M. De Kruijf⁷,
8. R. Levins⁸,
9. A.J. McMichael⁹,
10. N.O. Nielsen¹⁰,
11. W.G. Whitford¹¹

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Author Information

- 1 University of Guelph, Canada and Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, The University of Western Ontario, Canada
- 2 Department of Pathology, Faculty of Medicine, University of São Paulo, Brazil
- 3 College of Law, Centre for Studies in Agriculture, Law and the Environment, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada
- 4 Department of Biology, Center for Environmental and Hazardous Studies, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia
- 5 Maryland International Institute for Ecological Economics and University of Maryland System Center for Environmental and Estuarine Studies, Solomons, USA
- 6 Fisheries and Zoology Department, University of Washington, Seattle, USA
- 7 National Institute for Public Health and Environmental Protection, Bilthoven, The Netherlands
- 8 Harvard School of Public Health, Cambridge, Massachusetts
- 9 London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London, U.K.
- 10 Professor Emeritus, Department of Pathobiology, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, Canada
- 11 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, National Exposure Research Laboratory, Characterization Research Division, Las Vegas, Nevada

*Address correspondence to: Dr. David Rapport, College Faculty of Environmental Design and Rural Development, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, N1G 2W1, Canada. E-mail: drapport@oac.uoguelph.ca (<mailto:drapport@oac.uoguelph.ca>).

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COMMENTARY



Ecosystem Health: The Concept, the ISEH, and the Important Tasks Ahead

D.J. Rapport,* G. Böhm,† D. Buckingham,‡ J. Cairns, Jr.,§ R. Costanza,¶ J.R. Karr,|| H.A.M. de Kruijf,** R. Levins,†† A.J. McMichael,‡‡ N.O. Nielsen,§§ W.G. Whitford¶¶

*University of Guelph, Canada and Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, The University of Western Ontario, Canada; †Department of Pathology, Faculty of Medicine, University of São Paulo, Brazil; ‡College of Law, Centre for Studies in Agriculture, Law and the Environment, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada; §Department of Biology, Center for Environmental and Hazardous Studies, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia; ¶Maryland International Institute for Ecological Economics and University of Maryland System Center for Environmental and Estuarine Studies, Solomons, USA; ||Fisheries and Zoology Department, University of Washington, Seattle, USA; **National Institute for Public Health and Environmental Protection, Bilthoven, The Netherlands; ††Harvard School of Public Health, Cambridge, Massachusetts; ‡‡London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London, U.K.; §§Professor Emeritus, Department of Pathobiology, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, Canada; ¶¶U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, National Exposure Research Laboratory, Characterization Research Division, Las Vegas, Nevada

THE FOUNDING OF ISEH

The International Society for Ecosystem Health (ISEH)^a came into existence at a time when it was rapidly becoming apparent that the earth's ecosystems were failing, both locally and globally (Tolba *et al.* 1992). Despite worldwide attention drawn to the consequences of ecosystem degradation, and subsequent international agreements and treaties respecting the importance of maintaining the health and integrity of the earth's ecosystems, environmental degradation has continued and even accelerated (Vitousek *et al.* 1997; Ullsten 1998; Salim *et al.* 1999). ISEH was conceived to engage scholars from a variety of fields to bridge or even transcend the natural, social,

and health sciences. A primary goal was to provide the conceptual and methodological foundations for assessing the condition of the earth's ecosystems.

The idea for forming an international society around the concept of "ecosystem health" arose out of an interdisciplinary workshop on diagnostic indicators of ecosystem condition (Ecosystem Medicine: Developing a Diagnostic Capability. Allerton Park, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana 1991). Participants and founding members of ISEH were Val Beasley (University of Illinois), Robert Costanza (University of Maryland), David Cox (University of Illinois), Tony Hayes (University of Guelph), David Rapport (Statistics Canada), David Schaeffer (Eco Health Research, Inc.), Christian Thorpe (Kaiser Permanente Medical Center), and David Waltner-Toews (University of Guelph). Founders were an eclectic group of transdisciplinary thinkers from the fields of medicine, veterinary medicine, ecology, and economics who had come together to explore potential transfers from the fields of human and vet-

Address correspondence to: Dr. David Rapport, College Faculty of Environmental Design and Rural Development, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, N1G 2W1, Canada. E-mail: drapport@oac.uoguelph.ca.

^aWebsite: <http://www.uoguelph.ca/~rmoll>

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- [W.G. Whitford \(/advanced/search/results?searchRowCriteria\[0\].queryString="W.G. Whitford"&searchRowCriteria\[0\].fieldName=author&start=1&resultsPerPage=20\)](/advanced/search/results?searchRowCriteria[0].queryString=)
- [All Authors \(/advanced/search/results?searchRowCriteria\[0\].queryString="D.J. Rapport" "G. B%C3%B6hm" "D. Buckingham" "J. Cairns" "R. Costanza" "J.R. Karr" "H.A.M. De Kruijf" "R. Levins" "A.J. McMichael" "N.O. Nielsen" "W.G. Whitford"&searchRowCriteria\[0\].fieldName=author&start=1&resultsPerPage=20\)](/advanced/search/results?searchRowCriteria[0].queryString=)