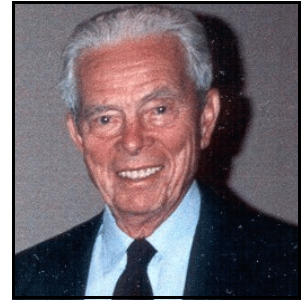


## Gilbert F. White 1911–2006



*The father of floodplain management, Gilbert Fowler White, died on October 5 at his home overlooking Boulder Creek in Boulder, Colorado.*

White, the Gustavson Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Geography at the University of Colorado since 1980, was a widely known and much-loved figure in geography, public policy, floodplain management, water resources, and environmental initiatives worldwide.

Born November 26, 1911 in Hyde Park, Illinois, White reportedly became interested in human-environment interaction during summers spent at a family ranch in Wyoming. He received his undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Chicago, and his 1942 doctoral dissertation, *Human Adjustment to Floods*, has been called the most influential ever written by an American geographer. "Floods are 'acts of God,'" he wrote, "but flood losses are largely acts of man."

Throughout his career, White championed the sound, comprehensive management of floodplains and the adoption of a broad range of adjustments to floods. He advocated adaptation to or accommodation of flood hazards rather than the structural flood control measures that dominated federal policy in the early 20th century.

He was instrumental in the investigations and reports that preceded the passage of the 1968 National Flood Insurance Act, and maintained a vigilant watch on the unfolding of the massive, multi-layered framework of flood loss reduction, insurance, and mitigation actions that sprang from that Act.

In the 1970s he foresaw the critical role that state governments could play in floodplain management and lent his guidance and support to the fledgling Association of State Floodplain Managers, participating in its activities whenever possible and offering criticism as well as praise for its efforts. "Over the years," ASFPM Executive Larry Larson says, "Gilbert was a guiding force for all of the Association's missions. His vision for wise use of floodplains and his persistence in working toward that—and his insistence that all the rest of us do so, too—was absolutely invaluable."

In 1985, the ASFPM named in White's honor what was to become its most prestigious award. The Goddard-White Award has been conferred to just 17 individuals since then, in recognition of exemplary achievements towards sensible floodplain management in the vein contemplated by White.

White was an inaugural trustee of the ASFPM Foundation, established in 1996 as an incubator for research and education that promotes wise floodplain management. The Foundation sponsors the Gilbert F. White National Flood Policy Forum, which periodically convenes the field's scientists and experts to consider and explore pressing policy issues.

Less well-known to floodplain managers were White's major contributions to the study of water systems in developing countries, the management and preservation of arid lands, global environmental change, international cooperation on water resources issues in such areas as the Mekong Delta and the Middle East, nuclear winter, geography education, the management of nuclear waste, and the mitigation of a wide range of natural hazards.

White was a member of the National Academy of Sciences, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the Russian Academy of Sciences. In 2000, he was presented the National Medal of Science by President William J. Clinton. He received dozens of awards and honors and was the author of hundreds of papers, articles, reports, and books.

White's long and productive life is ably chronicled in *Living with Nature's Extremes*, by Robert E. Hinshaw, published this past spring by Johnson Books. Copies can be obtained through the ASFPM at [http://www.floods.org/TheOrganization/GFW\\_Bio.asp](http://www.floods.org/TheOrganization/GFW_Bio.asp).

White is survived by his second wife, Claire Sheridan; by his children William White of Ithaca, New York; Mary White of Boulder, Colorado; and Frances Chapin of Edmonds, Washington; stepchildren Monika Profitt of Seattle and Daniel Profitt of Boulder, Colorado; and four grandchildren. His first wife, Anne Elizabeth Underwood, died in 1989.

*Donations may be made in White's memory to the ASFPM Foundation for a special memorial fund for continuing work on flood policy through [http://www.floods.org/Foundation/Files/ASFPM\\_Fndtn\\_Pledge\\_Form.pdf](http://www.floods.org/Foundation/Files/ASFPM_Fndtn_Pledge_Form.pdf). Donations also may be made to the CU Foundation at the University of Colorado for the Gilbert F. White Graduate Fellowship Endowment via [diane.smith@colorado.edu](mailto:diane.smith@colorado.edu).*