



James Michael Omernik

March 22, 1937 - June 22, 2022

James Michael Omernik, 85, passed away peacefully in his home on June 22, 2022. Jim was born March 22, 1937 to Edward E. and Alice V. Omernik in Rice Lake, Wisconsin, and spent his childhood years in nearby Spooner, Wisconsin. In 1960, he graduated from the University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire with a Bachelor of Science in Geography. His graduate studies in geography and cartography at the University of Kansas, 1960-1961 shaped his approach to geographic analysis. He worked as a Cartographic Technician with the Defense Mapping Agency in Washington, DC from 1961-1963, and then as a Terrain Military Geographer for the Defense Intelligence Agency in Arlington, Virginia from 1963-1972.

Jim married Kay Tucker in 1961, and they had three children, Beth, Susan, and Steve. In 1972, he married Joe Ann Brenneman and gained two additional children, Robin and Roxie.

In 1972, Jim and family moved from Virginia to Corvallis, Oregon, where he began a job as a geographer with the newly created U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. At the EPA, he led in the design and development of national and regional maps of stream nutrient concentrations attributable to nonpoint sources of pollution, total alkalinity of surface waters to assess sensitivity to acid rain, total phosphorus regions for lakes in the Northeast and Upper Midwest, and a hierarchical framework of ecological regions. He was a major participant in a NAFTA-related project of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation to map ecological regions of North America, and

was a member of the National Interagency Technical Team to develop a common framework of ecological regions for the conterminous U.S. His research to develop general and special purpose maps also helped clarify the use and misuse of watershed, hydrologic unit, and ecoregional frameworks. Jim's work took him to nearly every state in the U.S., as well as to countries such as Italy, France, Norway, India, Australia, Canada and Mexico to share his ecoregion mapping approach.

After a 30-year career with the U.S. EPA, Jim retired in 2002. However, he then became affiliated with the U.S. Geological Survey to continue his research and the important multi-agency mapping of ecological regions. He was forever grateful to all of the state, federal, and academic researchers, of many disciplines, that contributed to the mapping effort and helped him better understand the regional patterns of the country.

Jim's long-time friends (aquatic ecologist colleague and his wife) recently wrote to him: "Yours has been a life well-lived with a loving spouse and family and an astonishing number of accomplishments and interests: fisherman par excellence, skillful hunter, skier, traveler, collector of amazing shells and dedicated scientist and geographer; a naturalist who appreciates the beauty and eccentricities of life, a generous host with a talent for truly listening to the people you meet. I know of no other geographer or EPA researcher who has had the impact that you have had on ecological science and ecosystem management. The world is a better place because of you."

Jim was a wonderful husband, father, grandfather (Papa) and friend. He shared his love for the outdoors with all of us and left us with many fond memories; family visits to the river and coast, camping, vacations, hunting, fishing and ball games. The grief of our loss will be with us for a long time, but the joy of our memories will last forever. He is missed more than words can say.

Jim is survived by his wife of fifty years, Joe Ann; son, Steve (Misty); daughters Beth, Susan, Robin and Roxie (Ron); grandchildren Chris, Mackenzie, Joe, Katie and Anton; great grandchild Lilly; brother Dan Omernik;

sister Mary Skytland and nephew Eric Tetzlaff.

An open house celebration of Jim's life for his family, friends, colleagues, and neighbors will be held on Saturday, July 30, 2022 from 2 pm until 5 pm at the Corvallis Community Center, 2601 NW Tyler Ave, Corvallis, OR.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made to The Greenbelt Land Trust, Inc., 101 SW Western Blvd, Corvallis, OR 97333, or a charity of your choice.

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

JUL **30**. 2:00 PM - 5:00 PM (PT)

Corvallis Community Center
2601 NW Tyler Ave
Corvallis, OR 97330

Tribute Wall

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“ Jim provided unique tools to visualize what many scientists were trying to convey about our work. Having watched him display geographically the scientific information others had developed in a way that resonated with executives opened my eyes as to how to communicate complex information to decision makers. His unique work contributed greatly to the progress made in protecting our nation’s ecological resources.

Roger Blair - June 30, 2022 at 04:25 PM