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Speaker Biographies

Demetrios (Jim) Athanasiou – *President and Chief Executive Officer, St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation*

Jim Athanasiou took over as President and Chief Executive Officer of the St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation (SLSMC) on July 12, 2024. In this role, he is responsible for the overall operation of the Canadian portion of the binational Seaway system. Mr. Athanasiou joined the SLSMC in 2008 as Corporate Manager, Mechanical Engineering. In 2016, he was appointed Vice-President, Engineering and Technology and, just prior to his appointment as President and CEO, he led the SLSMC's team in negotiating a 20-year Management, Operation and Maintenance Agreement (MOMA) with the Federal Government.

Soham Balal – *Managing Director, gener8tor Sustainability*

Soham is an engineer and investor committed to driving innovation in climate solutions. He began his career at Burns & McDonnell, focusing on utility infrastructure upgrades. Currently, he serves as the Managing Director of gener8tor's Great Lakes Innovation Accelerator, funded by NOAA, where he is building a startup accelerator program to help scale early-stage water technology innovations. In this role, he works closely with startups to understand their challenges and develop a bespoke program to support their growth. This initiative is part of a four-year effort to launch 12 accelerators and fund 60 startups, fostering a resilient ecosystem of founders and mentors while creating pathways to commercialize novel water technologies.

Elizabeth Cisar – *Director, the Environment Program at the Joyce Foundation*

Elizabeth Cisar is the director of the environment program at the Joyce Foundation. She leads the Foundation's grant making to address three of the region's critical long-term environmental challenges: climate change, the safety and accessibility of the water we drink and the health of the Great Lakes. From May 2021 through October 2022, during a leave of absence from Joyce, Elizabeth served as Senior Policy Advisor to Radhika Fox, Assistant Administrator for Water at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In that role, she provided advice on policy and strategy and supported the implementation of Administration priorities in rulemakings, new policy development, and litigation matters.

Before joining Joyce in 2015, Elizabeth was Environment Program Director at the Crown Family Philanthropies, Director of Land Conservation Programs at Grand Victoria Foundation, and the Director of the Great Lakes Office of The Conservation Fund. In those roles, Elizabeth worked with landowners to protect land for hunting, fishing, parks, and recreation and developed voluntary programs to protect clean water. An attorney, Elizabeth also has practiced law in the nonprofit and commercial sectors. She clerked for Judge William J. Bauer on the U.S. 7th Circuit Court of Appeals. Elizabeth holds a J.D., magna cum laude, from Northwestern University, and a B.S. in Marine Science and Biology from the University of Miami.

João Ferreira – *Regional Economist, Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, University of Virginia*

João holds a master's in local economics and a Ph.D. in sustainable energy systems from the University of Coimbra in Portugal. Before joining the Cooper Center in 2023, João was a post-doc associate and lecturer at the University of Aveiro, Rutgers University, and the University of Florida. João is passionate about environmental sustainability, urban and regional economic modeling, and the impact of public policy on the local and regional economies. Improving our knowledge of the complex interactions between humans, the economy, and the environment is essential to establish a more sustainable path for us and future generations.

Angus Galloway – *Machine Learning Research Scientist, Engineering Technologies Canada Ltd*

Dr. Galloway obtained his Ph.D. at the Machine Learning Research Group at the University of Guelph and Vector Institute for Artificial Intelligence in Toronto, Canada. His thesis research identified vulnerabilities in neural networks and how to harden them for performance-critical applications. He led a multi-institution team to devise an information-theoretic framework for evaluating the robustness of machine learning models to multiple threat models as part of the DARPA program on Guaranteeing AI Robustness Against Deception (GARD). He serves as a mentor, research ethics reviewer, and has been recognized among the top 10% technical reviewers at the field's main academic conferences. He currently researches and develops deep learning-based computer vision methods to estimate invasive mussel and fish abundances at lake-wide scales.

Alaina Harkness – *Executive Director, Current; CEO, Great Lakes ReNEW*

Alaina Harkness is the executive director at Current, a Chicago-based water innovation hub. There, she has attracted federal and state investments, launched a real-time water quality monitoring platform and supported water startups. Harkness is also CEO of Great Lakes ReNEW, a National Science Foundation Regional Innovation Engine focused on resource recovery and the circular blue economy. Prior to this, she was a nonresident fellow in the global cities program at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. Previously, Harkness founded Civicana and was managing director at RW Ventures economic development firms. She has published research for the Brookings Institution, Crain's Chicago Business, San Francisco Federal Reserve Bank and CityLab. Harkness is a board member of Illinois Workforce Innovation Board, Urban Initiatives and Margaret's Village.

Rachel Havrelock – *Professor, University of Illinois Chicago*

Rachel is a professor at the University of Illinois Chicago where she directs [The Freshwater Lab](#). Celebrating its tenth anniversary in 2025, The Freshwater Lab designs water management and governance solutions for Great Lakes states, communicates water imperatives to the general public, and trains the next generation of Great Lakes leaders. Dr. Havrelock holds a PhD from the University of California Berkeley. Her early research concerned adaptive water technologies and environmental peacebuilding in the Middle East. This work received an Alumni Impact Award for Professional Fellows from the US Department of State. Turning her attention to the Great Lakes watershed, Havrelock discovered its paradigmatic history of collaborative, transboundary water management. She also perceived how emergent technologies from drought-plagued regions can be put to good use in the world's most extraordinary freshwater basin. Her Freshwater Lab serves as a hub for water diplomacy that productively brings people together at local, state, watershed, and international scales.

Dani Jones – *Research Faculty Member, Cooperative Institute for Great Lakes Research (CIGLR)*

Dani Jones is a research faculty member at the University of Michigan, working as part of the Cooperative Institute for Great Lakes Research (CIGLR). Dr. Jones has a background in physical oceanography, specializing in numerical ocean modeling and unsupervised classification. Currently, Dr. Jones is establishing the Great Lakes Artificial Intelligence Laboratory at CIGLR. This new initiative builds on a foundation of data science research and domain expertise, focusing on water level forecasting and observing network design. The Great Lakes AI Lab aims to leverage the research community's robust observing assets, extensive datasets, modeling capacity, interdisciplinary expertise, and numerous regional partnerships to enhance our understanding and management of this invaluable natural resource. By utilizing advanced AI techniques, the lab ultimately seeks to improve decision-making processes for the management of the Great Lakes.

Branko Kerkez – *Assistant Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering, University of Michigan College of Engineering*

Branko Kerkez is the Arthur F. Thurnau Associate Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Michigan, where he directs the Digital Water Lab. He is also the chief technical officer at Hyfi, steering research and development of sensing and AI technologies for urban water management. His research interests include water, data, and sensors. His group is working to enable smart water systems, which autonomously adapt themselves to changing conditions using real-time data and controls. His research projects have spanned wireless sensing of large mountain basins, real-time flood forecasting, robotics, and control algorithms for water systems. He is the founder of Open-Storm.org, an open-source consortium dedicated to freely sharing hardware, software, and case studies on smart water systems. He was recognized as a Gilbreth Lecturer by the US National Academy of Engineering in 2018 for his contributions to smart water systems. Other honors include the National Science Foundation's CAREER Award, Verizon Climate Resilience Prize, the Grand Prize for the WEF/WRF Intelligent Water Challenge, UM's 1938E Award, as well as numerous teaching and research paper awards. Dr. Kerkez holds a Ph.D. and M.S. in Civil and Environmental Engineering, as well as an M.S. in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science from UC Berkeley.

Brian Oszakiewski – *Executive Director, American Great Lakes Ports Association*

A native Chicagoan, Mr. Oszakiewski is a longtime transportation and infrastructure advocate with extensive experience in policy, government relations, communications, administration, and stakeholder engagement at the federal, state, and local levels. He has over a decade of experience on Capitol Hill managing transportation issues for a U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee member, serving in almost every staff position, including Chief of Staff and Legislative Director. Mr. Oszakiewski has led transportation policy and agency management in a Great Lakes governor's office and worked in government relations roles at transportation trade associations. At the National Transportation Safety Board, he oversaw all external affairs, including government relations, communications, advocacy, and safety recommendations, on behalf of the agency's Chair.

David Rankin – *Executive Director, Great Lakes Protection Fund*

David is Executive Director at the Great Lakes Protection Fund. He is responsible for all aspects of the Fund's activities including responsible investment of the Fund's endowment; budgeting, planning and resource management; recruiting, developing and retaining top talent; and directing all of these resources to advance the Fund's mission. David previously served as the Fund's Vice President of Programs. He has also held senior positions with The Nature Conservancy, USEPA, and state environmental protection agencies. He has negotiated international conservation agreements, testified as an expert witness in environmental litigation, designed new conservation and environmental protection programs, and drafted environmental laws and regulations. His environmental science degree was earned at Miami University. His MBA was awarded with High Honors from the University of Chicago.

Heather Stirratt – *Director, International Joint Commission Great Lakes Regional Office*

Heather Stirratt is the Director of the International Joint Commission's (IJC) Great Lakes Regional Office. As Director, she is leveraging key partnerships across the basin to elevate attention to and implementation of the IJC's water quality recommendations. By enhancing the IJC's binational connections across Canada and the United States (U.S.), Ms. Stirratt is increasing awareness of regional water quality challenges, monitoring and forecasting gaps to inform policy decision making, and the requirements for new freshwater science investments. Priority programmatic areas of interest to the IJC in the Great Lakes include water quality, early warning systems, enhanced science planning, and climate resiliency in a time of accelerated change.

Bryan Stubbs – *Executive Director & President, Cleveland Water Alliance*

Bryan Stubbs is a prominent leader in driving economic development through technology, particularly focused on the water innovation sector, currently serving as the president and executive director of the Cleveland Water Alliance (CWA) where he has successfully established one of North America's leading water innovation hubs; his key achievement is demonstrating how improving water quality through innovative technology can simultaneously boost regional economic growth, with CWA recently securing over \$13 million in investments for its advanced Water Accelerator Testbeds,

leading to significant job creation in the water economy exceeding other industries in the greater Cleveland area. Stubbs is also the managing partner of the Freshwater Innovation Fund, a \$25 million investment fund currently being established by the Cleveland Water Alliance (CWA). He holds a BA from the University of Kansas and an MBA from the University of Illinois at Chicago. A former entrepreneur, Stubbs enjoys spending his free time with his family and friends, cycling, and exploring new bourbons.

Louis-Pierre Trottier – *Director, Monitoring Center at CSL Group*

Louis-Pierre leads the Monitoring Centre at CSL Group, a team focused on data analytics and performance management. Over the past nine years, he has been involved in performance improvement initiatives, including predictive maintenance solutions, scheduling optimization and artificial intelligence projects. His expertise lies in applying data-driven insights to optimize supply chain efficiency.

Anne Vogel – *Director, Ohio Environmental Protection Agency*

Anne M. Vogel was appointed director of the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency by Governor Mike DeWine in December 2022. Within one month of assuming office, Director Vogel faced a critical test when called upon to coordinate a rapid and efficient response to the East Palestine train derailment. Through her proactive and collaborative efforts, Vogel has led Ohio EPA's efforts to contain the environmental and health impacts of the incident and protect the community. Prior to her current role, Vogel served as Policy Director for Governor Mike DeWine during his first term. Her leadership was instrumental in driving the implementation of significant initiatives, most notably the H2Ohio water quality initiative. This program brings together the efforts of Ohio EPA, Ohio Department of Agriculture, and Ohio Department of Natural Resources to improve Ohio's water quality. It focuses on establishing wetlands, reducing phosphorus runoff, and ensuring universal access to clean drinking water and quality sewer systems.