

## The Nature Conservancy's Jim Smith Receives

### U.S. Geological Survey's 2009 John Wesley Powell Award



TNC's Jim Smith with Suzette Kimball, acting director of the US Geological Survey. © Paul Cascio, USGS

Jim Smith, project manager of the [The Nature Conservancy's LANDFIRE Program](#) was presented with the U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) 2009 John Wesley Powell Award in a ceremony held on September 17, 2009 at the USGS headquarters in Reston, VA.

According to Matt Rollins, geographer at the USGS Center for Earth Resources Observation and Science (EROS), who nominated Smith, "Dr. Smith is able to resolve complex data assessment problems, demonstrates unique business skills, has the ability to communicate effectively and works collaboratively with teams of people. Put simply, he can tackle the very complex problems, but does so in a way that the results can be understood and used effectively by others. These strengths have not only enabled him to excel in his many technical contributions to LANDFIRE, but also have made him an indispensable member and contributor on the LANDFIRE Business Leadership Group, as well as a valued mentor to less experienced staff across all roles and partner organizations in the project."

Smith was nominated in the "private citizen" category for his leadership and expert knowledge of national-scale vegetation ecology that has supported the USGS goals of (1) providing support to the nation's ability to sustain and protect its natural environment, (2) supporting enlightened ecological based natural resource management, (3) preparing the nation for addressing landscape-to-regional effects of a changing climate and (4) improving the ability of the USGS to respond to natural disasters (e.g., wildland fire).

In its [official statement](#), the USGS explained both the LANDFIRE project and Smith's contributions in more detail, concluding with "Dr. Smith has demonstrated over the past several years how government and non-government researchers can work together to conduct effective science-based natural resource management. Through his leadership

within LANDFIRE, communities throughout the country are better able to predict, and mitigate the consequences of, the hazards of wildfire. As a scientist, leader, and innovator, Dr. Smith inspires the best in all his colleagues, and continues to make fundamental contributions to the success of LANDFIRE as a major national mapping, hazard reduction, and resource conservation

Joni Ward, science director of The Nature Conservancy's North America Conservation Region, notes that "TNC is a highly decentralized organization that expects its leaders to thrive with limited oversight and to deliver outstanding conservation results. Jim has taken that tall order to heart and has exceeded by almost any measure. Our organization benefits from Jim's conservation leadership; he is the rare example of a top notch scientist and highly effective manager. Jim and the TNC-LANDFIRE team have built a strong, respected collaboration with our partners in the federal land management agencies. We couldn't be more proud of our colleague in receiving the John Wesley Powel award."

The award is named after the distinguished scientist and explorer John Wesley Powell, who served as the second director of the USGS from 1881 to 1894, and who was a pioneer explorer of the Colorado River. It recognizes an individual or group, not employed by the federal government, whose contributions to the USGS's objectives and mission are noteworthy.

LANDFIRE is a collaborative program with the U.S. Forest Service and Department of the Interior that has developed geospatial data products that characterize current vegetation composition and structure, potential vegetation, surface and canopy wildland fuel, fire regime condition class (FRCC), and historical fire regimes across all 50 United States.

Smith has been responsible for managing the various project budgets, representing The Nature Conservancy at leadership and professional meetings, developing LANDFIRE reports, ensuring that LANDFIRE data products are consistent, comprehensive and based on the best available science and coordinating LANDFIRE application projects across the nation.

[http://www.usgs.gov/homepage/science\\_features/powell\\_award\\_2009.asp](http://www.usgs.gov/homepage/science_features/powell_award_2009.asp)