Getting Underway

Paul F. Hopkins (Figure 1) was born on May 26, 1955, the eldest child of Ronald and Joyce Hopkins. During his childhood, Paul and his family, including siblings Grant and Tammy, lived in Terryville, Connecticut. He attended Plymouth Public Schools and graduated from Terryville High School in 1973.

Paul was involved with scouting at a young age, which helped to stimulate the passion for the outdoors that would last his entire life.

Paul earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Forestry from the University of Maine in Orono, in 1977. During his time in Maine he also met Christine (Chris) Bown, who would later become his wife. After graduating, Paul moved to Syracuse to start his graduate studies at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF). He completed his Master of Science degree in photogrammetry and remote sensing at ESF in 1980 (Figure 2). In 1992, Paul was awarded his doctorate in digital photogrammetry and remote sensing from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Starting Work at ESF

Paul's professional growth was closely connected to ESF; in 1979, before he had finished his Master’s degree, Paul was hired as an Assistant Professor in the then Department of Forest Engineering. Paul worked at ESF for five years, during which time he and Chris welcomed their firstborn Eric to the world. In 1984, Paul took a leave of absence and moved his family to Madison, Wisconsin so he could work on his dissertation. The Hopkins family returned to Syracuse in 1986 and soon afterwards, Paul and Chris celebrated the birth of their second son Ryan. In the ensuing years, Paul gained tenure and moved through the professorial ranks at ESF, becoming a full professor in 1993. For much of Paul’s professional life at ESF, ASPRS Honorary member Robert (Bob) Brock, was Department Chair (Figure 3). After serving a 19 year term as Chair, Bob stepped down in 1999 and retired the year before Paul’s death.

For many years, Paul worked at ESF alongside his best friend, Bill Johnson (Figure 4). Bill was a key staff member at ESF from 1974–1979, and after a stint in Minnesota, returned to ESF in 1987 where he worked until his death in 1999. Paul provided amazing support to Bill through a multi-year battle with cancer; he was a true friend in difficult times. As a testament to how much the geospatial graduate students at ESF cared for both Paul and Bill, after Bill’s death a group of students volunteered for house-painting duty to help Paul sell Bill’s house. Paul worked with Bill's parents to use the funds from the sale of the house to establish the William L. Johnson Fund for the Mapping Sciences at ESF. This fund is used to support a range of geospatial instruction and research activities on campus such as graduate student travel to state and national conferences, including many ASPRS events. When Paul died, Chris requested donations to the fund in Paul’s name, so even after death, Paul continues to support ESF students.
Professional Service

Service was an important part of Paul’s career and he was proud to serve as the Director of the Council for Geospatial Modeling and Analysis (CGMA) at ESF. CGMA is a group of faculty and staff that was formed to facilitate coordination of the many diverse and dynamic activities associated with spatial information. Paul recognized the inherently interdisciplinary nature of the field and sought to use CGMA to engage his colleagues in spatial conversation across departmental boundaries.

Paul was involved with a wide range of professional societies, including the Society of American Foresters, the American Congress on Surveying and Mapping, and the American Society for Engineering Education. Without doubt though, Paul’s primary professional affiliation was with ASPRS (Figure 5, Figure 6). Paul joined ASPRS in 1977 as a student and was extremely active as a professional, including becoming a Certified Photogrammetrist in 1998.

Teaching and Advising

During his time at SUNY ESF, Paul advised and mentored 124 undergraduate students, 42 master’s students, and 10 doctoral students. Paul’s academic offspring are now working across North America as leaders in the government, private, and academic sectors. Paul taught hundreds of students in a dozen different geospatial classes including elementary surveying and map interpretation, remote sensing, and GIS at levels from undergraduate through advanced graduate. He developed one of the first distance learning course offerings at ESF: Coordinate Systems for GIS. While the course was incredibly valuable, Paul did admit that the videos of him teaching were good for nights when he had insomnia. Both in those videos and in real-life, Paul frequently came across as very structured and formal, and many remember the three-piece suits of his early years; however, Paul’s alter-ego, Joe Surveyor, was not the least bit reserved (Figure 7). Each year on Halloween, Joe would stop in Syracuse on his way from the Yukon Territories to enjoy the balmy weather in northern Maine. Joe gave a guest lecture in surveying and taught all of us not to take life, and ourselves, too seriously. As was the case for all his classes, Paul kept meticulous notes about what Joe wore, how he acted, and what he carried with him, including at least a dozen field books (Figure 8).

Paul served the Central New York (CNY) Region of ASPRS in a variety of capacities including President (twice), National Director, newsletter and webpage editors, and was a long time member of the Region Council. He also served at the National level as an Executive Committee Member, chair of the Strategic Planning and Membership Committees and was a charter member of the Electronic Communications Committee. He ran (unsuccessfully) for ASPRS Vice-President in 1993. A testament to Paul’s support of ASPRS is the presence of so many of his former students on the current CNY ASPRS Region Council.

While working on his doctorate, Paul became the first recipient of the ASPRS Robert E. Altenhofen Memorial Scholarship in 1986. He was also in Wisconsin long enough to receive a student of the year award from the Western Great Lakes Region of ASPRS. In addition to his academic awards, Paul received meritorious service awards and the Ford Bartlett Award from ASPRS. Paul was posthumously granted the honor of becoming ASPRS Fellow in 2004.
Research
Paul’s research made substantial contributions across a broad range of application areas and was supported by many sources including the US Department of Agriculture Forest Service, National Science Foundation, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and various state and county agencies. He was particularly interested in the spatial and radiometric integrity of remotely sensed data, which directly connected to his doctoral research in dynamic modeling for photogrammetric processing of SPOT satellite imagery. Through the years Paul made substantial contributions in the application of airborne and satellite imagery to forest management. At the time of his death, Paul was directing a NASA-funded project that considered technical and policy issues in using remote sensing for forest management. He was also involved in a NOAA-funded project that was using remote sensing to study algal blooms in the Great Lakes. Paul regularly presented his research at ASPRS and other professional society conferences and encouraged his students to do the same.

All the Extra Things Paul Taught
Paul felt very lucky because he was able to follow his passion and get paid for doing so. However, while Paul was clearly devoted to teaching, research, and service, there was so much about the rest of his life that he was also willing to share. Those that worked with Paul learned quickly that there was only one professional baseball team worth supporting (Figure 9). Unfortunately, after rooting for a team that hadn’t won a World Series in 85 years, Paul has missed the three winning seasons that the Boston Red Sox’s have had since his death. However, Paul did get to witness his beloved Syracuse University Basketball team win the National Championship in 2003, living vicariously through two of his undergraduate students who drove down to watch the game.

Anyone who ever received an email from Paul was certainly familiar with his tagline: Live to Ski, Ski to Live. Paul always said it could wait until Thanksgiving to snow, but after that, it had better start accumulating because he was going to ski (Figure 10). He skied in Central New York with great regularity, but also at many mountains across the US, taking his skies with him to several ASPRS conferences.

In the spare time he had (likely when it was too dark to ski), Paul enjoyed reading. He was a fan of a variety of types of books, and introduced Harry Potter to his students by sharing his son Ryan’s books. Paul also enjoyed finishing his day with a beer and was happy to tie that in with a good cause. In 2000, Paul was instrumental in setting up an ESF alumni event when he was in Washington DC for the ASPRS conference (Figure 11).
With Paul in DC that year was ESF alumnus Gerry Kinn who taught at ESF while Paul was on leave in Wisconsin. Gerry maintained a close relationship with ESF, including stepping in to help several of Paul’s PhD students complete degrees that were ABMP—All But Major Professor.

Paul and His Family
Paul passed his love of the outdoors to his sons. Both Eric and Ryan skied and were active in a variety of sports, but they were particularly engaged in scouting. They both became Eagle Scouts, though Ryan did so after his father’s death. Paul went on many scouting trips with his sons; he attended the National Jamboree with Ryan in 2001, and Philmont Scout Ranch with both boys in 2002 (Figure 12). Paul shared many memories of the eleven day trek at Philmont including the need for his boots to spend the nights in the bear-safe food bag, after a young scout somehow covered them in liquid cheese. And with a carry-in-carry-out philosophy, for months after Paul returned from Philmont, he carefully compressed his lunch scraps into a tiny cube to minimize waste volume.

Eric was 21 when Paul died, Ryan 16. Eric has since completed a bachelor’s degree at Plymouth State University in New Hampshire and has stayed in New England; Ryan earned a bachelor’s degree through Syracuse University and lives in Central New York. Paul’s wife Chris has just retired from teaching in the Syracuse City School district, but has returned to volunteer in the schools. Not only through scouting, but through his church and many other activities, Paul did everything he could to support his family (Figure 13). He worked hard, but he played hard, and supported his boys in all aspects of their lives.

Finishing Words
Paul passed away unexpectedly on July 29, 2003. He collapsed on campus and while emergency personnel were quickly called to the scene, they were unable to revive Paul; the heart that had given so much to others had failed him. Paul changed the lives of many people, but perhaps particularly the students that he mentored. Figure 14 shows an accumulation of words from the Acknowledgements section of many of the theses and dissertations Paul supervised; the bigger the words the more often they appeared. This figure clearly reflects Paul’s nature as a gentleman, mentor, and friend. His passion and love of what he did serves as a model for us all.

Figure 11. Gerry Kinn, Neil Murphy (then ESF President), and Paul Hopkins, 2000.

Figure 12. Paul at Philmont Scout Ranch, 2002

Figure 13. Eric, Paul, Chris, and Ryan Hopkins, 2003.

Figure 14. Words from the acknowledgements section of theses and dissertations that Paul helped supervise.
Yearbook