



WILLIAM T. PECORA AWARD

Dr. James Irons

For his dedication and leadership in advancing Earth observations from space and shaping the future of satellite capabilities essential to understanding the Earth system.

Dr. James Irons' distinguished career reflects his advocacy for understanding Earth as an integrated system, driving transformative advancements to satellite missions that have delivered broad benefits to society. Dr. Irons is best known for his contributions to the Landsat program. He led the charge advocating for the continuation of the thermal bands from Landsats 4, 5, and 7 into the Landsat 8 design and drove technical advances that helped establish the standards and processes for data calibration and quality assurance that are still in use today. His broad thinking and understanding of the needs of Earth system science led to the expansion of Landsat usage, pioneering applications such as evapotranspiration estimates and water quality. His leadership and advocacy for improved science and partnership with numerous stakeholders led to the continuity of foundational measurements critical for supporting applications that benefit the United States (U.S.) economy and its citizens.

One of his greatest contributions has been the forging of bridges across communities. Dr. Irons understood the importance of a community working together to break new ground in the field of Earth observations. His determination and dedication were critical to ensure continuity of the Landsat program, and to further cross-mission collaborations, expanding the breadth and scope of disciplines necessary to understand the Earth system. His significant leadership established fruitful and effective working collaborations across the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the U.S. Geological Survey, which helped establish the current model for the Landsat program.

His vision and progressive thinking were critical during challenging times, and his infallible leadership sustained morale, productivity, and created resilience that led to outstanding performance by the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center (GSFC) Sciences and Exploration Directorate's Earth Sciences Division during his tenure. While at GSFC, he championed the advancement of interdisciplinary science necessary to understand the Earth system. He was, and remains, passionate about educating and mentoring the next generation of scientists, demonstrated in his tireless support for education and outreach efforts at NASA and beyond.

In recognition of his sustained career leadership and advocacy for sustained technical advances to the Landsat mission, his forging of bridges across Earth science communities, and his dedication to the next generation of scientists, the Department of the Interior and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration take great pleasure in presenting the 2026 William T. Pecora Award to Dr. James Irons.

Secretary
Department of the Interior

Administrator
National Aeronautics and Space Administration