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Dr. Robert Ettema is an expert in several aspects of engineering hydraulics, including hydraulic structures, the fundamentals of alluvial-channel behavior, and cold-regions hydraulics.

Since August 2015, he is the Harold H. Short Chair in the Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering at Colorado State University. During the period July, 2007- August, 2013, he served six years as Dean of the College of Engineering and Applied Science at the University of Wyoming (UWyo), and then served as a professor at UWyo. From January 1999 to July 2007, he was head of the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Iowa (UI), and before then progressed up the usual faculty ranks at IU. He has been extensively active as a member of UI's Iowa Institute of Hydraulic Research during the period August 1980 - July 2007.

He pursued his engineering education at Auckland University, New Zealand, attaining the PhD degree in 1980. He presently continues his New Zealand engineering connection as a Fellow of the Institute of Professional Engineers, New Zealand (IPENZ).

Dr. Ettema has served as Editor of the American Society of Civil Engineer's Journal of Hydraulic Engineering (1998-2002), and currently is an associate Editor for ASCE's Journal of Cold Regions Engineering. In 2002 he received ASCE's Hunter Rouse Award in engineering hydraulics. He was the Technical Program Chair for the 2009 World Congress of the International Association of Hydraulic Research and Engineering (IAHR). The Congress, held in Vancouver, was jointly organized by IAHR, ASCE, and the Canadian Society of Civil Engineers. He and two coauthors received ASCE's 2011 Karl Emil Hilgard Hydraulic Prize for best paper in the Journal of Hydraulic Engineering. Earlier, in 1991 he received the Gustave Willems Best Paper Award from the U.S. Section of Permanent Association for Navigation Congresses (PIANC). In 2015, he received ASCE's Hans Albert Einstein Award (River and Sedimentation Engineering). He currently is a member of IAHR's Council, and is Chief Editor for IAHR's book and monograph series.