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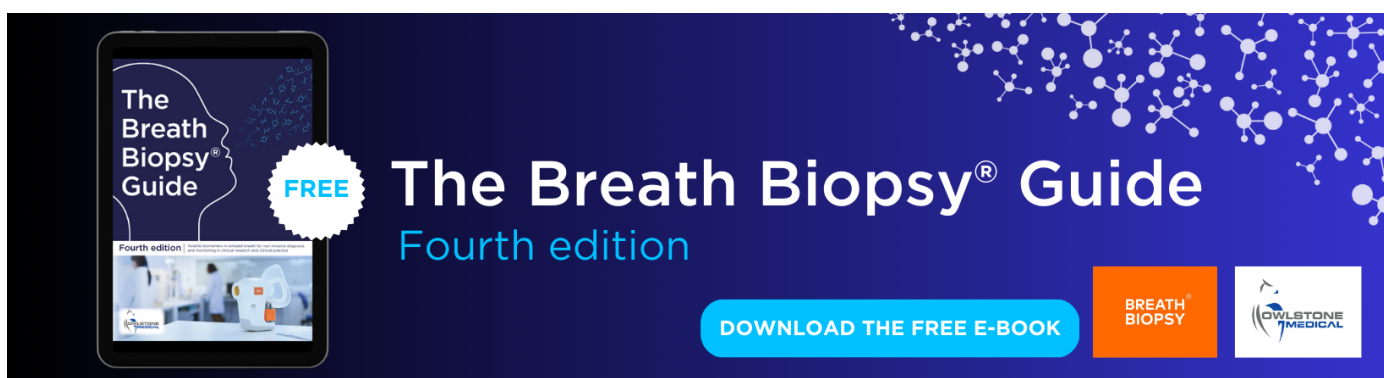
## The need and challenge for *Environmental Research Letters*

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## EDITORIAL

# The need and challenge for *Environmental Research Letters*

**Editor-in-Chief****Daniel M Kammen**  
*University of California,  
Berkeley, USA**Why another journal?*

This is the inevitable question that every effort to launch a new journal must, and should, address. A common statistic in the business world is that nine out of ten new restaurants fail. In the academic world something similar, but less definitive, can happen: a potentially interesting, but practically flawed, effort can be launched, never truly build an intellectual community, but then continue as a sub-critical, little-known journal for far too long.

The challenge any new publication, academic or professional, faces is thus extreme. A new journal must find a way to usefully compete, and bring new value, in the face of multiple existing outlets for significant results, tremendous barriers to establishing a 'track record' or 'name recognition' against existing publications, and a print and a cyberspace increasingly desperate in the search for 'content', scientific or otherwise.

In the case of *Environmental Research Letters* (ERL), however, these questions answered themselves and, as a result, I cannot imagine a more critically needed new publication. Indeed, the goal of ERL is to be more than simply one more good new journal. It is to be a place—both physical and online—that those engaged in environmental issues—from researchers within the physical and natural sciences, to those concerned with applied systems studies, modeling and simulation techniques, practical engagement in environmental activism, and developing, conducting or critiquing policy, legal, or business efforts—will all want to go to read, and to engage with colleagues.

The environmental field has witnessed an incredible intellectual and professional proliferation. The areas of ecological resilience, global change science, policy, law and economics, industrial ecology, green buildings, environmental genomics, environmental archaeology, and the sociology of environmental movements have become increasingly regarded and, to varying degrees, recognized themselves as major fields. To that illustrative list, the number and diversity of emerging areas of investigation have also blossomed—from the economics of biodiversity, to the interface of synthetic biology and agro- and bioenergy crops and systems, to the potential of the nanotechnology/energy interface to become the 'next trillion dollar industry', environment, science, and technology are changing at incredible rates.

While many of these areas have, or will have, highly focused journals and publications, a massive void has developed in the linking and dialog around what are the truly seminal advances in environmental science, social science, business, law, and policy. The need for this dialog is vital, and yet it is far too easy to forget in the hectic and information overloaded academic, business, governmental, and non-governmental communities.

Everyone recognizes that environmental research and practice today exists within an increasingly interdisciplinary setting. That simple statement, often echoed, but easily forgotten on a day-to-day basis, is the intellectual glue that we must not neglect, and from which will come many of the advances that make understanding the environment so unique. ERL begins publication this month, October 2006, in an intellectual milieu that lacks a journal and a forum for such an environmental discussion and dialog.

Until now, there has been no place to access the combination of environmental research breadth and depth that is the goal of ERL. The format of the journal is intended to facilitate such exchanges. ERL will be built around concise, high-impact original research Letters that present important results from across the environmental spectrum. As the first open-access journal to cover the whole of environmental science, our aim for ERL is to offer:

- **Completely free access to original research of the highest quality.** The environmental research and action community is diverse, both intellectually and geographically. ERL's open-access publishing model will make it a truly unique resource for scholars in developed and developing nations, as well as for environmental non-governmental groups, public servants, businesses and industry groups, and anyone who would not normally find their way, or have the financial means, to access an academic journal. Our goal to remain open-access will require that ERL secure a commitment of financial support—ideally from a foundation, individual, or a national or international research agency—so that the journal can publish in this fashion without the support of significant article publication charges. In this area we call on you to consider supporting, or to direct our editorial staff to groups who want to support, this venture.
- **Exceptionally fast publication.** As it gears up for regular publication, ERL is committed to a 90 day turn-around from article submission through to online publication for accepted Letters.
- **Outstandingly high article visibility.** ERL's open-access publishing model will guarantee its authors high article visibility, capturing a wide audience that includes both specialists and the wider community. The journal will serve its broad readership by publishing Perspectives that put disciplinary papers in a wider context, and explore the intellectual and policy impacts of broader, cross-disciplinary papers. A significant fraction of the research articles published in ERL will appear with 500–1000 word commentary pieces—solicited from not only leading scholars, but also leading political, business, legal, and community leaders—that extend and expand the dialog of the papers. Several articles published in the inaugural issue of the journal will be accompanied by such Perspectives.

ERL will also link academic to professional development. In addition to primary research, the journal and its forthcoming accompanying community website will include:

- **Special issues**, focusing on fast-changing environmental issues. For 2007, we already have issues planned on 'Environmental Health and Justice', 'Global Impacts of Particulate Matter Air Pollution', 'Wind Energy' and 'The Rebirth of Nuclear Power'.
- **Environmental news**, including topical features and reviews of research developments, conferences, patents, and fast-breaking scientific and political events.
- **Job listings and notices**, in academic, industrial, and public-service areas, to help link the community and to make the website of added value to the entire environmental community.
- **Events listings**, providing a directory of conferences, meetings and workshops taking place across environmental science.

Institute of Physics Publishing is a not-for-profit, learned society publisher with a comprehensive range of products serving the scientific community. ERL will therefore benefit from tools at the forefront of electronic publishing including completely online author and referee services that enable the community to communicate and provide feedback to the journal as easily and efficiently as possible.

Finally, ERL would be impossible without a tremendously dedicated and active staff, which it has, but also without a diverse and engaged group of editors and advisors. It is in this last area, the editors and advisors who have agreed to sign-on and serve despite the incredible pressures and competition for their time, where I am truly thrilled. Both the [board of editors and advisory committee](#) collectively reflect the geographic, intellectual, and disciplinary diversity that ERL must support and expand. With aerosols, carbon sequestration, climate variability, ecological economics, environmental history, environmental justice and law, human and environmental health, R&D policy, renewable energy science and policy, science and government, all represented on the board, ERL has buy-in from leaders across the spectrum. That said, we always invite, and will solicit, input on areas and individuals to add.

So welcome to the inaugural issue of *Environmental Research Letters*!