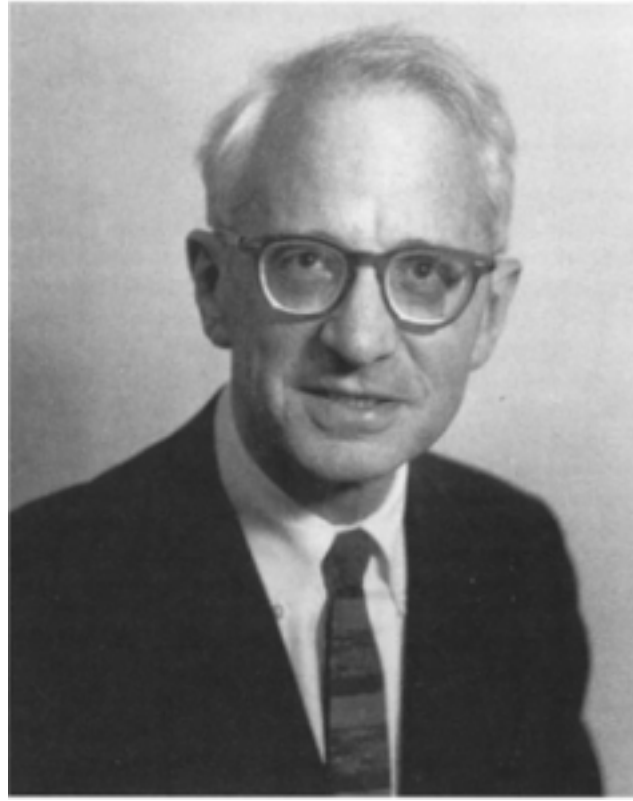


# VHP Scope

## Walter B. Langbein (1907–1982)



Walter Langbein was dedicated to science that benefited the public good and was known as a versatile and talented hydrologist. Born in New Jersey in 1907, he obtained his civil engineering degree in 1931 from Cooper Union while attending night classes and working for a construction company. In 1935, he joined the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) in Albany, but within a year he was transferred to the national headquarters, where he served as a research engineer and senior scientist for the rest of his life.

Langbein's contributions to the field of hydrology are extensive. His 1955 book, *Floods*, with W. G. Hoyt, was instrumental in the development of the National Flood Insurance Program. He developed methods in flood hydrology and the application of statistical methods to the analysis of hydrologic data. He studied evaporation from water bodies, varying from small stock ponds on the Navajo Reservation to Lake Mead. He studied infiltration in stream channels and its effect on flood wave passage. As early as 1944, Langbein was interested in the use of hydrologic data for the estimation of climate change. With Luna Leopold, he worked to establish a national program in water resources research, which led to the development of the Office of Water Resources Research within USGS. Langbein was instrumental in founding the International Hydrologic Decade (1965–1974), and his participation in the decade focused attention on the determination of the worth of hydrologic data for water resources development. The theory of scientific network

design for water data networks evolved from his work.

Walter Langbein was awarded the William Bowie and Robert E. Horton Medals from the American Geophysical Union, the J. C. Stevens Award of the American Society of Civil Engineers, the Distinguished Service Award of the Department of the Interior, and the Warren Prize of the National Academy of Sciences. He and Professor Korzun of the Soviet Union were named corecipients of the International Prize in Hydrology, awarded by the International Association of Hydrologic Sciences.

Langbein once remarked that one's professional career is a race against obsolescence. As noted by others, any hydrologist would claim that Walter B. Langbein clearly won the race.

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\*\*\*Please send your suggestions, additions, and corrections to [Efi Foufoula-Georgiou](#).\*\*\*

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