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Bill became interested in fire ecology as an under-graduate and focused his graduate degree research on fire effects, fire history studies, and the application of fire research results in vegetation management. From 1978 to the present he taught courses in silvics (forest ecology), forest measurements, tree and shrub identification (dendrology), paleoecology, forest fire control, and forest fire management at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Bill served as an instructor for The Nature Conservancy's Basic and Advanced Ecological Burning Workshops and for several NWCG "S-" and "RX-" courses. He has served as a member of working groups involved with FRCC and LANDFIRE analyses for northeastern U.S. vegetation types. In the Northeast, he was one of the first NPS-certified burn bosses and the first TNC-qualified Fire Leader.

His research during the past 50 years includes fire history studies in Minnesota, northwest Alaska and in the eastern U.S., particularly in New England. During the later part of his career his work increasingly involved prescribed burning experiments in North Atlantic Coastal Plain pine-oak forests and barrens. He took sabbaticals as a Bullard Fellow at Harvard University (1984-1985), and as a visiting research scientist at CSIRO, Canberra, Australia and as resident fire ecologist at Acadia National Park (1991-1992). For his work in facilitating prescribed fire use in New England, he received The Nature Conservancy's President's Stewardship Award (1991) and the New England Wildflower Society's Conservation Award (1992). He was awarded the Natural Resources Award for Research (NPS, Northeastern Region - 2010), the Fuels and Ecology Award by the National Park Service (2011), and the Herbert Stoddard Lifetime Achievement Award by the Association for Fire Ecology (2012). He currently serves as a "Community Representative" with the North Atlantic Forest Fire Exchange.

Bill received his B.S. degree in Botany and Plant Pathology from the University of Maine (1967), and his M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in Forestry from the University of Minnesota (1969, 1978). He served as a Lieutenant in the US Naval Reserves during 1969 to 1972 with tours aboard ship with the US Atlantic Fleet and at HQ-MACV, Saigon, RVN. He currently resides in Northfield, Massachusetts.