Under what circumstances is the reproduction of information allowable without first obtaining explicit permission from its owner? When is it a violation of the law? When we log onto the homepage of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and see a copyright symbol at the bottom of it, how does that restrict our use of the content presented on that site? What about other websites where no copyright statement is provided? How should we evaluate our professional conduct in light of our vague perception that copyright abuse seems to be widespread in our society? What recourse can we pursue when we need to make a definite determination as to whether a specific professional decision might constitute copyright infringement? What do we do if we discover that we’ve accidentally appropriated or distributed protected content without authorization?

The complexity and interpretive latitude of copyright law can elevate daily professional choices from simple decisions based on “the law” into complicated ethical evaluations. We all photocopy professional materials and download information off the Internet. We all build upon the work of our predecessors. Most of us work in the for-profit business sector. As licensed professionals, we must maintain high standards in our daily affairs; the common excuse “everybody does it” (e.g., makes and distributes photocopies) is not appropriate. This “awareness-level” presentation explores these issues and was developed in response to the Texas Professional Geoscientist (P.G.) annual continuing education requirement pertaining to professional ethics and conduct (22 TAC §851.32(d)).

Biographical Sketch

ALISON STEELE MANDADI, P.G. received a Bachelor of Science with Honors in geology from Acadia University in Nova Scotia, and a Master’s degree in earth & planetary sciences from Washington University in St. Louis. She has 15 years of environmental consulting experience and is currently a Principal with Steele Environmental Services, LLC.