

Here are some notes from the LTER Executive Board meeting that took place on September 11, 2014:

Attending: Anne Giblin, Charley Driscoll, Evelyn Gaiser, Peter Groffman, Julia Jones, Mark Ohman, Deb Peters, Emma Rosi-Marshall, Gus Shaver, Mary Spivey, Bob Waide

Issues discussed:

1. This meeting was called to discuss the decision by NSF not to renew funding for the Sevilleta LTER. They will get three years of funding to wind down activities at full, two-thirds, and one-third normal funding. Coincident with this decision, Scott Collins has stepped down as chair, Peter Groffman has become chair and Will Pockman has asked to be replaced on the Executive Board. The objective of the meeting was to discuss actions that the Executive Board and/or the network should take in response to this action.
2. There was a general consensus that we should send a note out to the network so that people are aware of what has happened and what actions we are taken. Points that should be included in this note include:
 - NSF remains committed to a strong and full LTER network.
 - There is active discussion at NSF about adding a new site (hopefully arid land) in the near future.
 - We are taking steps to ensure that we don't lose any more sites:
 - We are planning a series of meetings to discuss issues related to LTER proposals including conceptual models, long-term data, expectations from NSF, probation, etc. The first of these meetings will be the afternoon of November 10 at NSF in Washington. We envision that this first meeting will be relatively small, with a subset of site PIs and representatives from NSF. We then envision a larger meeting associated with the LTER mini-symposium in February, a still larger meeting associated with the LTER Science Council meeting in May and a yet larger meeting at the LTER ASM in September. Our goal is to get a clear sense of what NSF expects from our sites, an understanding of the approaches that different sites have taken to meet these expectations, and a set of "best practices" that sites can use as they prepare proposals.
 - We are preparing a document to highlight the importance of network dynamics and the need to evaluate and consider the many effects of losing a site on the network as a whole.
3. There was a general consensus that we did not have enough information and/or justification to appeal or protest the decision. Reviewers of the Sevilleta proposal clearly noted that this was a highly productive site carrying out state-of-the-art research on critically important topics. Yet, there were concerns about project cohesion and links to unique long-term data streams. Indeed, there have been many comments from the reviewer community over the years about a lack of integration among different components of LTER projects. While many of us disagree with the decision to not renew funding for the site, we do not see a strong basis for protest or appeal.
4. While we do not see a strong basis for appeal or protest of the decision, there are several issues in the review and renewal process that warrant discussion and possibly change:

- The “probation process” is problematic in that concerns, interests and review priorities change over time as a new proposal is being prepared. We should consider if there are things that we could do as a network to help sites that are on probation and if there are things that NSF could clarify.
- Standards for reviews are evolving at NSF; with different expectations for older versus newer sites. Expectations will be a key topic for discussions with NSF and within the network over the next few months.
- There is some confusion about just how results from mid-term reviews are used during the review process. This is something that we need to clarify with NSF and then publicize widely to the sites.