



Long-Term Ecological Research Network 10 year review response

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August 9, 1993

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Dr. Clutter:

The LTER Coordinating Committee has reviewed the report, Ten-Year **Review of the National Science Foundation Long-Term Ecological Research (LTER) Program**, as you requested in your letter of July 12. This was done at a meeting of the full committee in Madison, WI on July 30. The following items summarize the Committee's major comments on the report. 1. The LTER/CC feels that the Ten-Year Review Committee, under the co-chairmanship of Dr. Paul Risser and Jane Lubchenco did an excellent job of reviewing the program under a very tight timeline. It appear to us to accurately reflect the accomplishments, inadequacies and future potential of LTER. We compliment the Review Committee and thank both the Committee and NSF for the contributions that we believe their report will make.

2 . The LTER/CC is prepared to accept the challenge that the ten-year review lays down: a major expansion in the breadth of the LTER Program in terms of an enlarged geographic scale increased orientation to networking and synthesis+ and application of ecological science. The LTER/CC specifically addressed the issue of a major alteration in both the nature (oriented more to multi-site science and a network concept) and the scope of LTER in its discussions and was unanimous in being prepared to respond to any related NSF initiatives,

3. The LTER/CC strongly agrees with the emphasis in the ten-year review on giving too priority to the maintenance of the original long-term research projects. The pressure to generate "new" . initiatives at each renewal, while operating at the same budget levels, has not served the objective of maintaining original project goals.

4. While the LTER/CC strongly agrees that greatly increased funding will be necessary to support major expansions in site and network responsibilities, it has concerns about priorities and mechanisms. Specifically, LTER/CC sees the priorities for funding as (1) increased funding for existing

sites to reflect true costs, (2) expansions of intersite/network research, and (3) the addition of new LTER sites. The LTER/CC is also concerned that, in the process of increasing funding levels, care be taken to avoid setting up competition among existing LTER sites; this has been and remains critical to fostering open networking among the sites.

5. **LTER/CC feels that the most critical immediate task for NSF in implementing the ten-year report is to improve review procedures for the current cohort of LTER renewals.** Specifically, the responsible NSF program urgently needs to provide instructions and guidelines for proposal preparation to the sites preparing new proposals. Should the proposals reflect any or all of the suggestions made in the ten-year review, or should they follow the old rules? Secondly, LTER/CC **strongly** urges that NSF adopt all of the recommendations made in the ten-year report regarding procedures to be followed in the review process, such as the comprehensive instruction and provision of critical historical documents to reviewers. Correctly or incorrectly, the LTER sites do not feel that management of the reviews has been optimal.

6. The L T E R was not completely comfortable with the proposal to drop the core areas as an organizing element for LTER. The core areas are seen as having had a positive influence in forcing sites to have breadth and providing at least some commonality. The LTER/CC felt that the core areas still have value and should not be dropped until "something" is available to take their place. The LTER/CC is not persuaded that the alternative direction provided by the ten-year report is adequate to guide programs toward common components. LTER/CC did like the new goal statement proposed in the ten-year report.

7. The LTER/CC agrees with the ten-year review that the LTER Program has not done as well as it should in developing common data sets. While LTER has made a better showing in the areas of data management, remote imagery, and meteorology, among others, the limited level of data comparability among sites in the Program is a source of chagrin, and the LTER/CC agrees that achieving dramatic improvement in this situation must be made a high priority during the second decade of LTER. This is a difficult issue, however, including concerns that LTER not commit itself to a mindless collection of some common data sets; such efforts need to be driven by specific scientific questions or hypotheses.

The LTER/CC is committed to aggressively addressing the issue of comparability, including: (1) the identification of important common questions and parameters, (2) the development of protocols and standards for collection of comparable data, and (3) the institution of quality control procedures. The LTER/CC intends to begin this process in earnest at the 1993 LTER All Scientists Meeting in Colorado. One tact will be to convene groups to address comparable data sets in topical areas, including soil measurements, biodiversity, primary productivity, stream measurement, decomposition, tree population dynamics, and landscape parameters. **LTER is, however, going to need strong support-financial and otherwise-from NSF** in this process of identifying and implementing programs for development of comparable data sets:

8. The LTER/CC strongly agrees with the emphasis that the ten-year report places on increased interdisciplinary activity. This includes increased activity across levels of biological organization among physical and biological scientists, and between the social and natural sciences. LTER/CC did not feel that the report gave sufficient emphasis to the interface between the ecological and social sciences, including economics. Science at this interface is developing very slowly relative to its potential and societal needs. LTER/CC urges NSF to give this interface high priority in both funding and visibility.

9. The LTER/CC agrees with the proposal for expanding the number of LTER sites. We agree with the ten-year review that there should be greater specificity in future Requests for Proposals on the ecosystems or biomes of interest: there is a need for a process to identify and prioritize the ecosystems desired as additions to LTER. LTER/CC **strongly agrees with the emphasis on regionalization of existing programs through the use of satellite sites.** This is a direction in which LTER sites have already been moving and encouragement from NSF, including additional funding, would be very helpful; this form of expansion should have a high priority.

The LTER/CC did not feel that the Ten-Year Review gave sufficient attention to expanding the system of LTER sites by involving other agencies, such as the USDA Forest Service and National Park Service. In our LTER-2000 document this was identified as a major mechanism for expanding coverage of the sites without depending so heavily on the NSF budget. The LTER/CC continues to feel that the development of truly integrated efforts with other agencies may be the best way to create significant expansion in LTER site coverage, leaving available more NSF funds for other elements of an expanded LTER program.

10. The LTER/CC discussed the recommendations of the ten-year review regarding governance of LTER and the LTER Network Office, and recommends that this topic receive additional study. The Report recommendations do not reflect that the Network Office is responsible to both the LTER/CC and to NSF, which provides the funds. The recommendations also do not reflect the difficulties inherent in having a committee of 18 (and potentially twice that number) widely dispersed sites directing a large and active network program. The LTER/CC will address the issue of governance during the next year with a view toward developing a detailed proposal on the roles and structure of the full committee, an executive committee, the director of the Network Office the Network Office, and NSF. The LTER/CC recommends that NSF consider whether it would be more appropriate to handle funding of the Network Office through a management contract rather than a grant mechanism.

11. The LTER/CC is prepared to accept the larger role in the application of environmental science to societal issues proposed in the ten-year report. We would expect to cooperate with the Ecological Society of America, the Sustainable Biosphere Initiative Project Office, and other appropriate organizations and agencies in these activities.

12. The LTER/CC did feel that the role of LTER internationally received little attention in the ten-year review. NSF needs to continue to provide LTER/CC with clear direction on its expectations in this area. These items summarize the major responses of the LTER/CC to the ten-year report. The Committee thanks NSF for providing us the opportunity to provide comments, and stands ready to respond in implementing the review team's vision of LTERN.

If I can personally be of assistance in providing additional information, including answers to specific questions, please let me know. I intend to be in Washington, D.C. on September 8 and 9, and I would be happy to meet with you at that time to discuss either the ten-year review or the LTER/CC response to it. I will also look forward to your participation in the LTER AI1 Scientists Meeting and International Summit in late September.

Sincerely yours,

(signed by Jerry Franklin)

Jerry F. Franklin

Chairman, LTER Coordinating Committee

CC: LTER Principal Investigators

LTER Executive Committee

LTER Network Office staff

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