

VISION STATEMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL LTER NETWORKING

An earlier vision statement, "LTER 2000", challenged the US LTER community to expand its ability to understand ecological processes acting at broad scales by promoting the development of a global network of LTER sites. From the 1993 International LTER Summit to the present, the U.S. LTER Network has catalyzed efforts in over 40 countries to encourage the growth of long-term research as a fundamental way to understand complex systems. The Network Office, in particular, has provided the advice and training required for network planning and implementation, electronic communication, and information management.

With formal networks in 22 countries and more in the planning stages, the ILTER Network has matured to the point where it is now important for the broader LTER and environmental science community to become actively engaged in developing international research efforts that promote scientist-to-scientist, site-to-site, and network-to-network interactions. While the U.S. LTER Network Office remains the primary mechanism to stimulate many of these activities, it relies on scientists throughout the ILTER Network to accomplish the scientific objectives.

The ultimate goal of the overall effort is to enhance the communication and translation of results to increase the value of the research programs at individual sites and, ultimately, their collective value. Many of these foreign LTER sites, particularly in developing countries, need further time to mature as research platforms that will lead to interdisciplinary research and extrapolation to larger areas or regions. As they mature, they will become more capable of providing the scientific basis for management and policy decisions that incorporate social and economic issues, and attract scientists from other sites and networks, expanding the network. We anticipate that the ILTER effort will contribute significantly to other international efforts such as the Global Terrestrial Observing System (GTOS), International Geosphere-Biosphere Program (IGBP) and DIVERSITAS.

For the time being, it is crucial that the US LTER Network continue its leadership role in ILTER by promoting network development, reinforcing the LTER research and data management standards, and stimulating global research perspectives. Without this continued attention, we believe that the many national LTER networks would not effectively coalesce into a truly international system of researchers and sites.

The main objectives and recommendations articulated at the 1993 International LTER Summit continue to be useful guidelines for the future development of the ILTER Network (see <http://www.ilternet.edu/meetings> for details.) That group saw the development of an international network as a mechanism to break down national boundaries that often proscribe the scope of ecological studies. In addition, the existence of a global network of sites conducting long-term ecological research was viewed as a needed tool to address issues of global change that have increasingly dominated the attention of ecologists and policy-makers. The development of an international network of networks would be only the first goal of the ILTER effort; the linking of scientists, sites, and networks through a well thought out global research strategy is the ultimate objective of the International LTER program. That is our challenge today..