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WORKSHOP REPORT

ENGAGING HUMANITIES AND ARTS IN
LONG-TERM ECOLOGICAL RESEARCH PROGRAMS

A Workshop for Charting the Next Steps

May 6-8, 2011

H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest and LTER site, Blue River, Oregon

Workshop sponsor: National Science Foundation through LTER Network Office

Abstract: A May 2011 LTER workshop revealed strong interest and substantial accomplishment in engaging humanities and arts at more than a dozen LTER sites and similar programs. As a first step in building a network of sites and programs engaged in these programs, we have developed a webpage to share information and the creative work and also to encourage development of site-based programs with a long view of the place of humans in the natural world (<http://www.ecologicalreflections.com/>).

Recent events indicate growing interest both within and beyond the Long-Term Ecological Research (LTER) community in developing programs with collaborative engagement of the sciences, humanities, and arts in the sustained, place-based work of understanding ecosystems and our place within them:

- Several LTER sites have been doing this work for some years quite independently and substantial bodies of work have resulted (see webpage links below).
- Workshops at the last two LTER All-Scientists Meetings (Sept 2006, Sept 2009) were well received.
- NSF has provided supplemental funding to four LTER sites to engage humanities and arts in consideration of future scenarios of land change.
- Small workshops in 2010 at Tumamoc Hill Desert Laboratory (Tucson, AZ, hosted by Gary Nabhan) and the Aldo Leopold Legacy Center (Baraboo, WI, hosted by Curt Meine) explored ideas about forming a network of such programs that includes both LTER and non-LTER sites and programs.
- A survey of the 26 LTER sites and a similar number of relevant sites and programs revealed a significant number of sites or individuals at sites that have relevant work underway; others wish to do so.
- The Symbiotic ART & Science Conference: An Investigation into the Intersection of Life sciences and the Arts, sponsored by the National Science Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, hosted at NSF Headquarters Feb 28-March 1, 2011, exhibited strong and diverse interest in this collaborative work.

Representatives from a dozen LTER sites and two arts/education/outreach centers gathered at the Andrews Forest LTER site in the Oregon Cascades May 6-8, 2011, to

advance long-term, place-based collaborations among environmental sciences, humanities, and arts. This gathering was organized by the Andrews Forest LTER program and humanities collaborators of the Spring Creek Project for Ideas, Nature, and the Written Word in the Philosophy Department, Oregon State University, and sponsored by the LTER Network Office. Participants shared their experiences and hopes for further developments at their sites and a functioning network of such sites.

In several days of deliberations in the misty, ancient forest of the Cascades, the group held these discussions and came to these perspectives:

Workshop discussions – review of work to date

Discussions at the workshop centered on the present state, prospective future, and value of this work at the participating sites and programs:

- The workshop began with reports from workshop participants giving overviews of science-humanities-arts collaborations. In some cases many ingredients are in place; in other cases relevant work is proposed or only envisioned.
- Overviews of programs supported as part of “LTEaRts” 2010 NSF supplemental grants to the four participating LTER sites (Andrews Forest (OR), Bonanza Creek (AK), Harvard Forest (MA) North Temperate Lakes (WI)). See webpage links below for examples of outcomes of that work.
- The ensuing discussions included sharing approaches across all sites/participants, including ideas about basic arts/humanities inquiry in parallel with basic science and methods of outreach, funding, approaches to soliciting and contracting arts and humanities participation, and archiving and sharing products.
- The benefit of functioning as a network was discussed at length – see Networking notes, below.
- Humanities/ecology field trip: Part of the workshop was time in the forest with a mix of humanities and science offerings, followed by discussion of how to use the land (listen to the land) in these programs.

Core features of these collaborations

We agree upon four core features of these collaborations to capitalize on the distinctive strengths of LTER and like programs, some based more strongly on arts and humanities:

- Be highly interdisciplinary across arts, humanities, and science, with balanced standing of all participants
- Take the long view (even 200 years), even though there is no guarantee of funding
- Capitalize on the power of place – to capitalize on the unique opportunities offered by the diverse natural settings of the individual sites
- Assemble, archive, and actively share outcomes of the work

Not all programs or all disciplinary areas are amenable to all of these features, but collectively these features are goals for program development and execution. These features collectively and in some cases singularly distinguish these programs from hundreds of other programs, such as artist residencies in beautiful places.

Objectives

We wish to foster development of programs that bring together people from the sciences, humanities, and arts in long-term attention to places and their cultural and normative meanings, as these change over time and generations. We wish to grow a record of creative response to the nature of change in place, thus deepening our understanding of the place of humans in the natural world, a necessary condition for wise, far-seeing decisions in a time of change and challenge.

The net effect will be a mixture of primary inquiry in the arts and humanities in parallel with the sciences, education, other forms of outreach, even leading to advocacy. As has been the case with the long-term science of LTER, a body of work will be left for future scientists, policy makers, historians, and artists to use in ways we cannot anticipate.

Audience

Ultimately, it is everyone. Communications would be through education programs in K-12 and above, via media to the public, in public performances, and any other suitable channels.

Relation to NSF objectives and evaluation criteria

As discussed at the workshop, this work fits well with the Broader Impacts evaluation criterion of NSF proposals, and an established program can be a conduit for new work under new grants, perhaps giving proposals a competitive advantage. Large training grants, such as IGERTs, commonly contain a requirement for training in ethics, so association with an established environmental and professional ethics programs on a local campus would also give competitive advantage to proposals. But there is also a “basic arts/humanities” component to the work; this is more than the science journalism of re-telling scientists’ stories. Artists and humanists have insights to the meaning of place and the work of science that are not often recognized by scientists, so there can be a contribution to Intellectual Merit in engaging arts and humanities in work at these sites of long-term inquiry.

Scope of disciplines

Humanities

- Creative writing: fiction, non-fiction; essay, poetry, ...
- Environmental philosophy: environmental justice, ethical issues of land use, ...
- Environmental history: shifting terms of human perception and engagement with the land, role of the site in changing understanding of the land, ...

Arts

- Visual: photography, graphic art, painting, print making, sculpture, ...
- Dance
- Music
- Drama/theater

Sciences

- Ecology
- Earth sciences
- Social sciences

Boundaries among these disciplines are in many cases diffuse, and individual programmatic activities may involve a blend. These collaborations are not meant to fully encompass work in education and social sciences, but may have some overlap, such as the combined use of arts and humanities in natural history education programs. Outcomes are delivered via performance, solid products, scientific or literary publications, blogging, education programs, media interactions, interpretation programs, and many other forms.

Networking – the value and the process

The group strongly agreed that having a network for internal and external sharing of information and accomplishments would greatly benefit participating sites. This would enhance the profile of this work and could be used to identify sites/programs to demonstrate “proof of concept” when sites seek support. Logistical support is also available through sharing of techniques of fund raising, approaches for engaging artists and humanists, archiving and sharing of outcomes, and other topics.

At the workshop we discussed strategies for fostering a network of sites doing this work. During the workshop and in subsequent discussions we decided that it is important to push program development at individual sites, so we have a large enough collection to justify seeking support for networking. We have begun by development of a webpage to share basic information about activities at sites participating in the May 2011 workshop (<http://www.ecologicalreflections.com/>). We will work to expand the number of participating sites/programs and capitalize on upcoming meetings, such as ESA in Portland and ASM in 2012, for further exchange among programs. We are exploring multiple options for funding of network activities, such as NSF’s Research Coordination Network program. Another idea (from earlier workshops) is for our representatives to travel to DC to meet with science (NSF), arts/humanities (NEA/NEH), and relevant lands (USFS, NPS) agency representatives to seek funding at the network scale.

Communications tasks and opportunities

- Communicate with all PIs and other relevant site staff, including sites not represented so they have a chance to get on board early.
- Webpage development to support networking. Initial content: links to existing site pages, profiles of site activities (using a common template), reports from relevant workshops (e.g., past All-Scientists Meeting workshops, one-of-a-kind workshops). See: <http://www.ecologicalreflections.com/>).
- “Manifesto” – prepare and share a statement of why this work is timely and important. Possible outlets: *Frontiers*, *Orion*. Catherine Harris drafted several for consideration.
- All-Scientists Meeting 2012 – plan a substantial presence, such as workshop and performance associated with poster session.
- ESA and other national meetings – share the work. ESA in Portland in 2012 (symposium, performances, how-to workshop, ...)

Addendum – Update as of December 2011 on activities since the May workshop

- ESA Meeting in Portland – we have proposals pending for an Organized Oral Session and a Workshop and are negotiating display of art work from the BNZ, HFR, and NTL programs
- ASM Meeting at Estes Park – plans are underway for a workshop, art exhibit, and possibly a performance.
- A display of art work from the BNZ, HFR, and NTL programs will be in the NSF lobby in conjunction with the annual LTER mini-symposium in March 2012
- Negotiations are under way for possible exhibit of the BNZ, HFR, NTL art works in the Portland airport for a six month period after the ASM meeting

Links to webpages for LTER programs with arts/humanities/science collaborations:

- Andrews Forest, OR. <http://and.lternet.edu/research/related/writers.cfm?topnav=167>
- Bonanza Creek, AK. http://www.lter.uaf.edu/outreach/bnz_Collaboration.cfm
- Harvard Forest, MA. <http://harvardforest.fas.harvard.edu/research/lteArts.html>
- North Temperate Lakes, WI. <http://cbe.wisc.edu/K12/paradiselost.html>,
<http://lter.limnology.wisc.edu/ltearts/>

Participants and Sites/Programs represented

- Nathaniel Brodie (writer, Program Assistant, Spring Creek/OSU) – Andrews Forest
- Terry Daulton (artist, freelance) – North Temperate Lakes
- Charles Goodrich (poet, Program Director, Spring Creek/Oregon State Univ.) – Andrews Forest
- Anita Guerrini (historian, Oregon State Univ.) – Santa Barbara Coastal
- Catherine Harris (artist, Univ. of New Mexico) - Sevilleta
- Clarisse Hart (Outreach and Education Manager, Harvard) – Harvard Forest
- Adrian Howkins (historian, Colorado State U) - McMurdo Dry Valleys
- Colby Leider (composer, Director of Music Engineering Program, Univ. of Miami) – Florida Coastal Everglades
- Mary Beth Leigh (soil scientist, dancer, Univ. of Alaska) – Bonanza Creek
- Christian Martin (Communications Director, North Cascades Institute, Sedro-Woolley, WA)
- Brenda Peterson (freelance writer, Andrews Forest writer in residence)
- Lindsey Rustad (ecologist, USFS) - Hubbard Brook
- Mark Schulze (forest ecologist, Andrews Forest Director) – Andrews Forest
- Art Schwarzschild (Site Director, environmental education, Univ. of Virginia) – Virginia Coast Reserve
- Barry Sparkman (artist, Arts and Humanities Coordinator, Arizona State Univ.) – Central Arizona-Phoenix
- Mary Spivey (Education and Outreach Coordinator, Univ. of Minnesota) – Cedar Creek
- Fred Swanson (geologist, US Forest Service) – Andrews Forest
- Eric Vines (Executive Director, Sitka Center for Art and Ecology, Lincoln City, OR)

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