

Here are some notes from the LTER Executive Board meeting that took place on October 7, 2014. This was an “extended” meeting where members of the Science Council were invited to participate if they wished.

Attending: Dan Childers, Charley Driscoll, David Foster, Anne Giblin, Peter Groffman, Sherri Johnson, Julia Jones, Karen McGlathery, Margaret O’Brien, Mark Ohman, Deb Peters, Ed Rastetter, Eric Seabloom, Gus Shaver, Bob Waide

Items discussed:

1. Letter to NSF about the decision to discontinue to Sevilleta (SEV) site

First, there is uncertainty about if we should ask NSF to delay or revisit the decision on the SEV proposal. The consensus is that we should not do that. This was viewed as a potential intrusion on the NSF peer review process and moreover, any request for reconsideration of a decision needs to come from the site itself. It appears likely that such a request will come from the SEV investigators, but this is not confirmed.

There was general agreement that the letter should indicate strong support for a new competition to add sites back to the network to at least partially make up for the loss of SGS and SEV. There is considerable disagreement about just how specific that recommendation should be. Should we recommend an arid site? An arid/semi-arid transition site? No geographic preference?

The second issue for discussion about the letter was how issues about “network” should be raised. There is disagreement about if the LTER network was/is/should provide comprehensive geographic coverage of the U.S. or is the LTER network a diverse array of sites representing contrasting responses and modes of control over long term change and regulation of populations, communities, and ecosystems that provides opportunities to develop cross-site and multisite comparisons in long term ecological research. There is also uncertainty about if we want to assert that cross-site activities are a fundamental component of LTER projects that should be considered in the review process. If so, how much weight should this be given? The general sense of the group is that we should not emphasize “geographic coverage” and that “role in the network” should be given some consideration in the review process.

There was considerable discussion about variability, changes and/or inconsistency in the review process for LTER proposals over time. These issues will be prominent on the agenda at our meeting with NSF on November 10.

Groffman will distribute a new version of the letter to all the sites (this was done on October 8). He asked for comments by Friday, October 17 and for an indication of if the sites do or do not “endorse” the letter so that he can be clear just who the letter is coming from.

2. Agenda for the meeting with NSF on November 10.

Groffman has been developing a draft agenda with the NSF LTER team. Topics include:

- Expectations and review criteria: have they changed? NSF will lead this discussion

- Conceptual models – how can we make these better? What are examples of models that have made LTER proposals “zing?” John Blair has agreed to lead this discussion.
- What is the value of network participation? Should “role in the network” be added as a criteria for review? Deb Peters will lead this discussion.
- Details about the process and reasons for terminating Sevilleta: NSF program officers will describe the general process followed but cannot discuss details about decisions with anyone but the SEV’s PIs.
- LTER panel composition. What is/has been the mix of LTER and non-LTER panelists. What is/has been the mix of disciplines on the panels, i.e. has there been consistent expertise in the ecosystems under evaluation. The information that NSF can provide is again very general.
- Probation - should there be changes to the way this is handled? Anne Giblin will lead this discussion.
- Relationships between LTER and non-LTER scientists. How can this be improved? Is it creating problems in review panels? Groffman will lead this discussion.
- Mid-term reviews. Have the procedures for this changed over time? Just how are the reports and the cover letter from NSF used in subsequent review processes. Someone from NSF will lead this discussion.
- Plans for transition to a new PI or new institution: what are NSF’s policies for renewal proposals? Someone from NSF will lead this discussion.

We will have another conference call before November 10 to harmonize presentations and attitude. Stay tuned for a Doodle poll for this.

Also stay tuned for meeting logistics. The LNO will arrange for a group of rooms as well as for a meeting room where we can gather before/after the meeting.

3. Mini-symposium in February

This will take place on Thursday, March 5, 2015. Dan Childers, Emily Stanley and Michelle Mack are organizing the program with a focus on primary production, based to some extent on the discussions from the Science Council meeting in 2014.

4. Compensation for the Chair of the LTER Executive Board

Funds for 4 – 6 months of salary support have been budgeted for this since the new governance structure of the LTER network started in 2006. However, this year, Scott Collins generously gave this up to allow LNO operations to continue. Groffman is now the chair, but there are no funds for compensation. Waide is trying to find some funds. Further, the LNO has been told not to ask for funds for this in any “bridge funding” grants that they write. Going forward, NSF has asked for more/better justification for this in any future grants. Groffman wants to know what people think is a suitable

amount of compensation to ask for; 1 month, 2 months, 4 months, 6 months? He will get some input from past chairs (Magnuson, Robertson, Collins).

5. New OCE-funded LTER sites

Ohman provided an update on how NSF OCE is interested in possibly adding two new coastal sites. Proposals would be due sometime in 2016. This very exciting development is completely unconnected to the SEV/SGS replacement RFP. There will be an open town hall meeting at ASLO (Ohman leading). There is a need to discuss how sites should be prioritized – geography, repetition? NSF wants feedback from the community on this.

6. LNO transitions.

There is great uncertainty about what will happen to LNO operations when their current agreement with NSF expires in April 2015. They have submitted a second proposal for the LTER ASM. Discussions about “bridge funding” have been slow, this many complicate planning for the Science Council meeting.