



Ecological Society of America
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May 23, 2019

ESA Statement to the National Science Foundation BIO Advisory Committee

On behalf of the Ecological Society of America (ESA) and its members, we appreciate the opportunity to express ESAs strong support for the National Science Foundation's (NSF) investment in the National Ecological Observatory Network (NEON). We offer NSF our support and assistance in the establishment of effective, transparent engagement of the user community for NEON's operational phase.

ESA and the scientists it represents have been deeply engaged with planning and designing NEON since the 1990s. We recognize and appreciate NSF's vision, and we have been excited to see the observatory becoming a reality after many years of planning and development. NEON staff members have brought expertise, energy, and dedication to the completion of observatory infrastructure and the initial delivery of data products. Now that NEON is moving from the construction phase to the operational phase, it is appropriate and necessary for NSF to revisit the question of optimizing scientific leadership and management of NEON in a way that engages the user community most fully and promises the most productive scientific return on NSF's 30-year investment.

Two key priorities for the ecological community are of critical concern at this juncture: first, the nature of governance and scientific leadership for the observatory; and second, the mechanisms by which NEON users will be engaged and involved.

Scientific leadership: The scientific community expects that scientific priorities will have a leading role in facility operations and management, and this should include substantive authority for the Chief Scientist in managing both financial and human resources.

Engagement with the ecological user community: Engagement with the community is now, and will be, an essential foundation for the successful and productive operation of NEON. Given the anticipated 30-year lifespan of the observatory, the challenge is not simply to attract today's users but to recruit and prepare the next generations of users.

In the past few years, NEON's Science, Technology & Education Advisory Committee (STEAC) has been a highly visible means of communication between observatory management and the user community, but it is structured so that the STEAC may only report to Battelle. ESA recommends that NSF establish another advisory committee or mechanism independent of

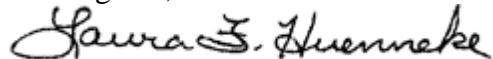
Battelle that reports directly to NSF to gain the confidence of the ecological community and achieve the goals of NEON. The Long Term Ecological Research Network communications office, which is well respected within the ecological community, is one such model to consider using for NEON community engagement.

Moreover, ESA believes there is more work to do in engaging a truly diverse population of researchers, educators, and students. We urge the observatory's managers and NSF to strengthen the commitment to inclusion of the full diversity of the ecological community's membership, broadening participation at all levels from leadership to staff to users.

ESA has been highly supportive of NEON over the past several years. This support includes offering venues for workshops training researchers and educators in the use of NEON data products, special organized sessions at the annual ESA conference, and collaboration with the former Chief Scientist to recruit early career scientists for special orientation to NEON. We seek to continue our support of NEON and for NSF's investment in this major facility.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the BIO Advisory Committee about how to best engage the ecological community as NEON enters its operational phase.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura J. Huenneke". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "L".

Laura Huenneke
President