

13 October 2006

Dear Colleague:

Things are happening so fast in NEON that I wanted to bring you up to date and to remind you of two more opportunities to provide input to the NEON overall design.

A draft of the final Integrated Science and Education Plan (ISEP) was posted on the NEON website (<http://www.neoninc.org>) today. If you have comments we welcome them. A draft Request for Information (RFI) will be available for comment very soon. What you see in those two documents was informed by all of the comments and suggestions that were made on the last draft of the revised ISEP. Obviously, not every suggestion could be included. We will be receiving many more suggestions about the science of NEON as the community develops documents in response to the RFI.

NEON undergoes a Conceptual Design Review (CDR) by an NSF panel the week of 6 November and we must produce three documents for the panel by 23 October that are based on this revised ISEP (informed by community comment). The RFI that folks have been waiting for will also be based on this final ISEP. Because of this tight schedule, if there are important comments on the two documents, we need your response to them by noon EDT, Sunday, 22 October.

The revised ISEP does not differ much from the one provided by the recent writing committee that Chris Field chaired. I believe that most of the key points of their document have been retained in some form because it was so well done by them initially. There are some changes that have been made based on the very significant inputs from all of you on the draft and, of course, by NEON Inc.

Let me switch gears for a moment. The ISEP and the soon-to-be released draft RFI may appear to open NEON up to a much broader series of studies than was envisioned previously. While that is correct, and a good change, it will not be possible to include all the good science that the community recommends in the ISEP or the responses to the RFI as part of the final NEON design. It should not come as a surprise to you that no single program can realistically be designed to adequately address all of the Grand Challenges. I mention this now because we need all the input we can get from the RFIs, but we do not want to erroneously and unrealistically raise the expectations of our colleagues. Also, do not forget that NEON is specifically designed to accept additional infrastructure as funds become available from any source. This will permit the community to use NEON facilities for additional research.

Following the CDR, we will respond to items brought up by that panel. In January the RFIs will be reviewed by another NSF panel and then be sent to NEON Inc. to be used to further refine the NEON design. Another NSF panel will review this revised final design in spring of 2007 as part of the Preliminary Design Review (PDR). After that we have reviews of the entire project by the upper management at NSF and then the National Science Board.

Currently, we are looking for our new CEO. We have interviewed a set of finalists and the Board of Directors is considering these candidates. We had some great finalists and should be able to announce a successful candidate sometime in November. At the same time we are looking for a Project Manager to oversee construction and deployment of NEON. A distinguished search committee has been assembled. These individuals have significant experience with project management of large programs.

By now you get the picture. Things are happening fast. The program is taking shape. Remember, however, we really need your continued support. The most immediate thing you can do for us is to review the ISEP and RFI by 22 October.

Thank you for your past and continued support. If you all were not behind us, there would be no reason to persevere. I can honestly say that I become ever more confident of NEON as a transformational project as the weeks go by.

Jim

Jim MacMahon, Chairman, NEON Board of Directors.  
Trustee Professor of Biology and Director of the Ecology Center  
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