The Director's Report, September 2007

School of Natural Resources
From Earth to Sky and Everything in Between

Introducing a New Way to Stay in Touch
by Donald A. Wilhite

Each month I will be preparing a newsletter to keep faculty, staff, and students apprised of my activities during the preceding month. Simply speaking, the purpose of this newsletter is to keep you informed of how the director and the administrative team are working on your behalf. I do not intend to bore you with the details but instead to focus on the big picture and also to pay special attention to your achievements. After all, it is these achievements that heighten our visibility with stakeholders, advance the science, and educate our SNR and UNL students.

August and Beyond

As you can imagine, August was a very busy month for me. Moving and settling in to a new office and adjusting to life as SNR Director has been exciting, a bit challenging at times, but very rewarding. The bottom line is that I am having fun in my new position. I am enjoying working with all of SNR’s incredibly talented faculty and staff. We are also very fortunate to have such a great group of new and returning graduate students. Together we will prosper and achieve our vision.

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Upcoming Events

Upcoming Events (at Hardin Hall unless otherwise noted)
Sept. 12, 3 p.m.
Gary Willson, National Park Service, Great Plains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit
Collaboration Possibility: Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture in Costa Rica

In early August, I participated in discussions with representatives of IICA, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture, based in Costa Rica. The mission of IICA is to promote prosperity in the rural communities of the Americas. Much of IICA's work occurs under the auspices of the Organization of American States (OAS). In my previous position as Director of the National Drought Mitigation Center, I worked closely with OAS and IICA on a number of occasions to promote improved drought monitoring and management in Latin America. I visited Costa Rica several times and interacted with IICA staff. Two of their key areas of interest at the moment are the development of improved programs in natural resources management and adaptation to climate change. SNR has much to offer and IICA leadership is very enthusiastic about the possibility of building collaborative programs in natural resources with SNR. My goal is to build a long-term relationship with IICA. It is quite likely that we will host Dr. Jim French during the spring semester to discuss potential areas of collaboration. Jim's responsibilities are in the areas of technical leadership and knowledge management. He will also be giving a seminar at SNR and meeting with faculty, staff, and students in informal discussions.

Collaboration Possibility: Corporacion para Investigaciones Biologicas in Columbia

Kyle Hoagland and I have been working with Susan Fritz, IANR Associate Vice-Chancellor, and Ofelia Chacon-Barletta on the development of cooperative programs with CIB, Corporacion Para Investigaciones Biologicas in Medellin, Columbia. We participated in a video conference to compare the expertise and

Sept. 18, 7 p.m.
Ed Harvey, SNR, Groundwater and Salt in Eastern Nebraska’s saline wetlands

Sept. 19, 3 p.m.
James Derr, Texas A&M, Conservation Genetics of North American Bison

Sept. 26, 3 p.m.
Larkin Powell, UNL, Isotopes and Animal Movement

Oct. 3, 3 p.m.
Jonathan Jenks, South Dakota State University, Chronic Wasting Disease

Oct. 10, 3 p.m.
Darryll Pederson, UNL Weathering, Water and Geology in Niobrara Tributaries

Oct. 16, 7 p.m.
Robert B. Kaul, UNL State Museum, The Flora of Nebraska

Oct. 17, 3 p.m.
Nels Troelstrup, Jr., South Dakota State University Water Monitoring in the Northern Great Plains

See SNR September 2007 calendar.

Director’s September Travel

September 9-14, Washington, D.C.
research goals of CIB and SNR. The primary areas of common interest appear to be biodiversity/ecology, climate change, and water resources. The plan is to send two or three faculty from SNR to Columbia in the next few months to explore these possibilities further and to establish a strategy for future collaboration. I recently contacted faculty regarding their interest in participating in this program over both the short and longer terms. If you have not yet responded, please do so in the next few days.

Congressional Visits

August was a busy month for interactions with members of our congressional delegation. On August 16, I met with Jonathan Coppess and Kate Howard of Senator Nelson’s staff on natural resource-related issues in association with the pending Farm Bill. As some of you know, the House recently passed its version of the Farm Bill. The Senate’s version has not yet been released. There are some real opportunities for SNR in the Farm Bill. I also met with Steven Berry of Congressman Terry’s office on drought-related issues. He was visiting the National Drought Mitigation Center to learn more about their program and SNR.

New SNR Administrative Team

One of my first priorities this month was to select a new administrative team for SNR. I solicited applicants for these positions in early July in order to expedite the selection process. On August 21, I announced the members of the new Administrative Team. They are Ed Harvey, Associate Director; Sunil Narumalani, Research Coordinator; Betty Walter-Shea, Teaching Coordinator; Mark Kuzila, Survey Coordinator; and Matt Joeckel, Outreach Coordinator. I am looking forward to working with this outstanding group of faculty that has expressed a strong interest in contributing to SNR’s success. This team will work closely together to increase the level of interaction among
these different program functions—integrating these functions to a much greater degree than previously. I think this approach will heighten our visibility and success.

To further enhance the level of integration between program functions and our disciplinary and interdisciplinary program areas, I have also formed an Integration Advisory Team (IAT) composed of 14 faculty with diverse backgrounds and experiences. As the IAT begins its discussions, there will be ample opportunities to incorporate the ideas of all faculty, staff, and students in this visioning process. I appreciate the willingness of these faculty to be a part of this leadership team and the support of SNR's faculty, staff, and students in this process.

**Incoming Students**

SNR's investment in undergraduate recruitment and retention is beginning to pay large dividends. Incoming students to Natural Resource majors this fall increased from 32 last year to 52. Since August 2006 we hosted 69 visits from students and parents to our new Hardin Hall facility. In addition, the number of Natural Resources undergraduate majors increased to 199. Jennifer Aerni, Recruitment Coordinator, is looking for number 200. Jennifer is doing a superb job as are the SNR faculty who meet with these prospective students and then guide them through their programs. This fall SNR awarded $24,150 in scholarships to 36 undergraduates, and we received our first students into the new Applied Climate Science Area of Emphasis program through Environmental Studies.

Graduate student numbers continue to increase, too. We currently have 86 graduate students in SNR—56 MS and 30 Ph.D. In addition, our faculty are advising 22 more graduate students in other departments. One of our goals is to increase both the number of graduate students as well as the number of competitive GRAs that SNR provides.
Grants & Research

We have been productive this calendar year in generating grant funds. From January through July, SNR faculty received $3.8 million in grants. Since July, grants received totaled nearly $2.3 million. Grants submitted since July 1 totaled more than $8.76 million. I am working with several federal agencies to enhance that level of funding in the near future. An announcement will soon be forthcoming regarding a USGS-related workshop to highlight UNL research in water, climate, and other areas. This event is being organized by Vice Chancellor Prem Paul’s office with the assistance of several SNR faculty. In concert with VC Paul’s office, we will also be organizing “SNR Days” early next year to highlight our research activities in preparation for a Spring 2008 visit by SNR faculty to federal agencies in Washington, D.C. Stay tuned—more on these events in the near future.

New Faculty

I would like to welcome Dr. Ayse Irmak, Dr. Song Feng, and Cindy Larson-Miller as new faculty members in SNR. Ayse’s position title is Hydrologic Information Systems Specialist at the rank of Assistant Professor. She was hired through the Water Resources Research Initiative and has a 60% SNR appointment and a 40% appointment in Civil Engineering. Her appointment is 30% teaching and 70% research. Ayse will be teaching courses in Geographic Information Systems beginning in spring 2008. Song Feng has been appointed as a Climatologist at the rank of Research Assistant Professor in SNR. Song has worked with Steve Hu for several years in his research program and provides climate modeling training to students in Bob Oglesby’s classes. Cindy Larson-Miller has been hired as a Program Specialist at the rank of Lecturer and will develop new courses and oversee projects in association with the Toyota Foundation grant.
received by Dave Gosselin and Ron Bonnstetter. Please welcome them to the SNR family.

September is shaping up to be a busy month as we welcome the beginning of another academic year. I look forward to communicating with you both individually and collectively in the coming months.

School of Natural Resources
Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources
3310 Holdrege Street
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, NE 68583-0961
Phone 402-472-9873
FAX 402-472-3610