The Director's Report, October 2011

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

I hope many of you took advantage of the opportunity to attend Vice Chancellor Ronnie Green’s IANR 2025 presentation on September 16 in the Hardin Hall auditorium. I believe Ronnie did an excellent job of laying out a roadmap for change in IANR programs over the next few years as we refocus to meet the research, teaching, and extension needs of Nebraska in changing times. There are many challenges but the opportunities are tremendous. It was great to see our auditorium filled to capacity with faculty and staff from across campus.

The next steps in the implementation of many of the initiatives mentioned by Ronnie are now in the implementation and/or further discussion phase. The newly formed Deans and Unit Heads group meets monthly and will continue to discuss and roll out these changes. Stay tuned for more information in the weeks and months ahead.

SNR Director Search Committee Formed

CASNR Dean Steve Waller and Tala Awada, SNR associate director, will co-chair the search committee for a new director for SNR. Prospective members of the search committee received letters in September inviting them to serve on this committee. The co-chairs are now waiting for the invited committee members to accept their assignments. I know SNR faculty and staff are anxious to see this search process move forward quickly in order to transition smoothly to new leadership on August 1, 2012, when I will be stepping down from this position. Thanks to members of the search committee who have already expressed their willingness to commit their time to this important process.

Changes in Faculty Reporting Schedule – the eARFA

As indicated by Ronnie Green during his 2025 presentation, one dramatic change being implemented this year for the faculty evaluation process is the change in the submission date for the eARFA. The traditional reporting date has been November 1. The new submission date will be January 15. This will allow for reporting to be done for a full calendar year and will also take some of the pressure off faculty to report during one of the busiest times of the semester, just prior to the holidays and final exams. I believe this is a very welcome change for most faculty and administrators.

The change in reporting date will result in significant changes in the evaluation schedule. I have discussed this issue at length with Ron Yoder, the new IANR Associate Vice Chancellor, and it was also presented and discussed at the Deans and Unit Heads meeting on September 28. The goal is for all unit heads to complete their evaluations of faculty by February 15. These evaluations will then be distributed to faculty for review and comment. Individual meetings with faculty will begin around March 1, with the emphasis being placed on meeting with more junior faculty first. Meetings with fully promoted/tenured faculty will likely be delayed until May or June. It is also our goal to decouple the evaluation process from the individual meetings given that the focus of these meetings should be on faculty development/mentoring rather than on going through each element of the evaluation.

We are also continuing to discuss the issue of evaluation frequency for fully promoted/tenured faculty. We have not, as yet, been able to finalize decisions on that issue.

Faculty and Staff Positions – Update

Director's Report Archive

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Director's Upcoming Travel

October 10-16, 2011
Barcelona, Spain
With SNR faculty to visit the Autonomous University of Barcelona to discuss
The IANR cluster hire associated with water-related faculty and the Water for Food Institute is moving forward. Expect to see more on the interviews for four of these positions in the near future. Initially, the interviews will be scheduled for the Systems Agronomist, Crop Simulation Modeler, Irrigation Engineer, and Hydrogeophysicist. The one remaining position, Surface/Ground Water Hydrologist/Geospatial Hydrologist, is not ready to move forward and will need to be redefined. I have been in conversations with Ronnie Green and Steve Waller on this position.

The Remote Sensing Scientist position has been advertised and applications have been forthcoming. The search committee has been formed with Jim Merchant as the chair.

We have also received permission to move forward on refilling the position vacated by Tadd Barrow this past summer. This extension position will continue to be funded 50/50 between Extension and the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality (NDEQ). The ad for this position will come out in the next week and a search committee will be formed soon thereafter. This person will continue to be housed in SNR but the individual will share time with the Southeast Research and Extension Center and the DEQ.

Two Managerial/Professional positions, Hydrogeologist and Geologist, have been advertised and the search committees will be reviewing applications soon and developing a short list for approval in the near future. These positions are both associated with the Conservation and Survey Division.

Environmental Conflict Resolution Short Course

On September 21-22, 31 students, faculty, and state natural resource agency personnel participated in a workshop on environmental conflict management sponsored by the School of Natural Resources and IANR. The workshop was facilitated by Dr. Chris Moore, an internationally recognized expert in conflict management. Participants received two days of instruction in such areas as assessing conflict, initiating public participation, conducting public meetings, and collaborative problem solving. Participants unanimously agreed that the workshop was a very valuable learning experience that will improve their ability to manage environmental conflict. A recurring theme after the workshop was that participants wished they could have spent more time with Dr. Moore.

Thanks to IANR for co-sponsoring this event. IANR paid for Dr. Moore’s instructional fees. SNR covered his logistical costs and travel and hotel expenses. The training exercise was extremely well received by both students and faculty. Many of our IGERT students participated in this event as part of their training program.

Thanks also to Mark Burbach for his assistance in coordinating this short course and dealing with the logistics for the meeting.
Evening Seminar Series – Wildlife Encounters

The first outreach seminar of the fall semester was held on September 29 in the Hardin Hall auditorium. Dennis Ferraro, faculty member in SNR and the Southeast Research and Extension Center, teamed up with Wildlife Encounters for an outstanding presentation. Many animals were on display to an auditorium filled with children of all ages. This may have been the largest audience to attend a meeting in the auditorium since Hardin Hall was renovated in 2006. Thanks to Dennis and Wildlife Encounters and to SNR’s Outreach Committee for organizing this fun and informative activity.

Wildlife Encounters’ Burmese python is 12.5 feet long, weighs 150 pounds, and is leucistic, which is the technical term for "not exactly albino."

Breaking that old taboo of showbiz – never go on stage with children or live animals – resulted in what may have been the largest crowd in the Hardin Hall auditorium since it was renovated in 2006.
Great Plains Cooperative Ecosystems Study Unit (GP-CESU) – Change in Leadership

As many of you are already aware, SNR is the home of the Great Plains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (GP-CESU). The CESU is a network of 16 academic institutions in the Great Plains region and eight federal agencies. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln serves as host to the GP-CESU. As the host institution, one of our faculty serves as the director for this program. The first director of the CESU following its creation was Kyle Hoagland. Sunil Narumalani served in this role for the past two years. Larkin Powell has now agreed to serve in this capacity. Thanks, Larkin.

The CESU encompasses a broad geographical portion of the Great Plains and brings together an outstanding group of scientists in grasslands, ecosystems studies, and natural and cultural resources management for collaborative research, technical assistance and educational opportunities. The mission of the CESU is to determine the ecological state of public lands of the Great Plains and examine its future within the context of private lands. The goal is to improve the scientific basis for managing ecosystems in the region through more active and interactive technical assistance, research, and education among the partner institutions and agencies. The Research Coordinator for this program at UNL is Gary Willson, an employee of the National Park Service. Gary is housed in Hardin Hall.

SNR/Department of Natural Resources Data Committee

A meeting was held in September that included staff members from the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and SNR faculty and staff to discuss data needs for DNR in the short and long term. The emphasis for this initial meeting was on the availability of climate data but the discussions will soon be expanded to include other data, such as water, soils, etc. This discussion on data needs has grown out of a meeting between SNR and DNR staff held during the summer as a follow-up to our meeting with collaborating state and federal agencies last December. The next step in this process will be more focused meetings with specific staff, including Brian Fuchs from the National Drought Mitigation Center and Martha Shulski from the High Plains Regional Climate Center. There are tremendous opportunities for enhanced collaboration between SNR and DNR and we look forward to strengthening an already strong partnership.

Visit to ICTA, Autonomous University of Barcelona—Update

Steve Thomas, Amy Burgin, Mark Svoboda, and Tala Awada will be accompanying me to Barcelona in early October to meet with faculty members at the Institute of Environmental Science and Technology (ICTA) to identify potential areas for research collaborations. The final arrangements are currently being made for meetings on October 13-14. I will report on the outcomes of our meetings in my November director's report.

Kudos to Larkin Powell

Congratulations to Larkin Powell on his new position as Interim Associate Dean in the Agricultural Research Division. He will be in this position through June 2012. Mary Bomberger Brown has been hired to cover some of Larkin's teaching and research responsibilities in SNR during this assignment. We look forward to greater interactions with Mary in the months ahead. She will continue as program coordinator of the Tern and Plover Partnership, an appointment she has held since 2007.

Kudos to Ann Fiedler

[Image of Larkin Powell and Mary Bomberger Brown]
Congratulations to Ann Fiedler, the recipient of the IANR Outstanding Employee Award for June 2011. The award was officially presented to Ann at the September Fall Pizza Party and Birthday Bash, welcoming new employees and celebrating birthdays that occurred during the summer. Ann is an Office Associate in the National Drought Mitigation Center and has played a major role in the many successes the NDMC has achieved over the years.

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**Grants Awarded and Proposals Submitted**

Congratulations to SNR faculty and staff for grants awarded during September. Total funding received during the month was $863,001. The largest sources of grants received during September were from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Department of the Interior, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency. Those awarded funding included John Lenters, Scott Hygnstrom, Bruce Dvorak, Don Rundquist, Jim Merchant, Paul Merani, Leon Higley, Brian Wardlow, Mark Svoboda, Craig Allen, Anatoly Gitelson, and Mark Kuzila.

Proposals submitted during September 2011 were for funds totaling $2,485,484. SNR faculty and staff submitting proposals included T.J. Fontaine, Scott Hygnstrom, Mary Bomberger Brown, Mike Hayes, Mark Svoboda, Brian Wardlow, Tsegaye Tadesse, Cody Knutson, Martha Shulski, Matt JOeckel, Bruce Dvorak, Diego Riveros, Annabel Major, Lisa Pennisi, Milda Vaitkus, Brian Fuchs, John Lenters, Anatoly Gitelson, Jim Merchant, Lorrie Benson, and Jesse Korus. These proposals were mainly directed to Nebraska Game and Parks, Nebraska Environmental Trust, and NASA. Several proposals were also submitted for subcontracts through other institutions in support of collaborative research projects.