The Director's Report, December 2007

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

Introduction
by Donald A. Wilhite

Last month I prepared the Director's Report from the beautiful city of Budapest while attending the Europe Emergency Management and Response Conference, sponsored by the U.S. Trade and Development Agency. This month I am preparing the newsletter from Geneva, Switzerland, while attending a Public Weather Service Symposium sponsored by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). The focus of this meeting is the delivery of weather, climate and water information to decision-makers in the many sectors that rely on this information. In many ways this is what SNR does, collecting data and providing timely information to help stakeholders manage resources. More than 100 people are attending, representing national meteorological and hydrological services, the private sectors, and the media, and coming from more than 60 countries. I am serving as chair of the WMO Task Force on the Socio-Economic Benefits of Weather, Climate and Water Information, which partially explains why I am attending this symposium. I am also presenting a case study of the evolution and application of the U.S. Drought Monitor as an example of a successful
partnership between our national meteorological service (the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), other federal agencies (the US Department of Agriculture, the US Geological Survey, and others) and a university (the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln). This partnership is now evolving into the implementation of the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) by NOAA and other agencies, including the NDMC. Congress authorized funding for NIDIS in 2006, and the NIDIS web portal, Drought.Gov, went live on November 1, with substantial input from the NDMC staff.

Developing Collaborations

Those attending the SNR faculty meeting on November 28 learned about developing programmatic collaborations with other IANR and UNL units and agencies. This month’s newsletter provides me with the opportunity to share these potential collaborations with all SNR employees. First, discussions are in the early stages regarding a new faculty position that would be a joint appointment with Veterinary Science in the area of Wildlife Diseases. Faculty from SNR and Vet Science met in November to discuss a broad range of ideas in support of an enhanced program between the two units. We will meet again in December to prepare a position description. We hope to develop a funding partnership with the University of Nebraska Medical Center’s College of Public Health, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. More will be reported on these developments in the months ahead.

Second, SNR and the Department of Statistics are exploring the idea of joint graduate specializations in natural resources and statistics and possible joint undergraduate collaborations (e.g., a minor). The SNR faculty leading these discussions are Ken Hubbard, Drew Tyre, Steve Hu, and Jinsheng You. An initial meeting between the two units was held in November. The
outcome of the first meeting was that all agreed that joint
programs would be extremely beneficial to both units and would
provide extremely valuable options for our students when they
are entering the job market. Stay tuned for more information.

Finally, we are discussing the possibility that geographers in the
Department of Anthropology and Geography would join SNR. We
have had a meeting with the appropriate deans who would need
to approve this transfer and the initial response has been
favorable. A small group of SNR geographers is working with the
geographers in Anthropology and Geography on a white paper
that would present a strategy for further action. If this process
moves forward, it would offer considerable opportunities in
teaching, research, and outreach.

Field Trip to the National Center for
Atmospheric Research (NCAR)

I recently announced that SNR and the Department of
Geosciences will be participating in a field trip for graduate
students to visit the National Center for Atmospheric Research in
Boulder, Colorado. This trip will be during Spring Break, March
16-18. During this visit, students (and a few faculty sponsors) will
learn about the broad range of NCAR programs in atmospheric
science, water, ecology, and social science. If you haven’t yet
expressed your interest in participating in this field trip and would
like to go, please let Sharon Kelly know ASAP. Transportation
costs will be shared between SNR and Geosciences. Students
will only be responsible for motel costs for two nights (rooms will
be shared), meals, and incidentals. This is a great professional
development opportunity.

International Opportunities

In the September newsletter I reported on meetings with
representatives of the International Institute for Cooperation in
Agriculture (IICA) based in Costa Rica. IICA is involved in building
collaborations throughout Latin America and with North America on a wide range of agricultural and natural resource issues. During my discussions with them, they were particularly intrigued by the opportunity to develop a joint program with SNR on natural resource issues. I have invited Dr. Jim French and his colleagues to return to UNL in January to explore these opportunities. Their visit is tentatively planned for the end of January. Stay tuned for more information next month.

There is also a developing collaboration between UNL and Hohai University in Nanjing, China. Several scientists from Hohai University visited UNL in late October as part of a project funded by the National Science Foundation. A small team of UNL faculty from several departments is planning to visit Hohai University in April 2008 to explore opportunities for UNL to train graduate students in several fields of study, including natural resources. We expect these opportunities to evolve quickly during 2008 following our visit.

Larkin Powell, Blair Siegfried (Entomology), and Z.B. Mayo (Agricultural Research Division) visited Medellin, Colombia in early November to discuss collaborations with Corporacion Para Investigaciones Biologicas (CIB). We expect to have a discussion forum in January for interested faculty and staff to learn more about the outcome of their visit and next steps.

**Outcome of the NASULGC Annual Meeting**

In November I attended the annual meeting of the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges in New York City. I found this to be a very interesting exploration of new ideas and discussions as they relate to universities across the country. I also attended meetings of the Board on Natural Resources. In one of my weak moments, I volunteered to draft a white paper on climate change for the Board. The timetable is to complete this white paper in the next year. I will be relying on
input from SNR faculty as well as recent reports from the
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

**Director's Seminar Series**

During my interview for the SNR Director position, I indicated my
intention to develop a Director’s Seminar Series. My goal is to
invite high profile persons to SNR each semester to discuss
issues of broad interest to SNR faculty, staff, and students. Next
semester, two people will be coming to SNR to present seminars
and to interact with SNR employees and others. I expect the
seminars to be of broad interest to faculty, staff, and students
across the university campus.

*Dr. Rosina Bierbaum*, Dean, School of
Natural Resources and Environment,
University of Michigan. Rosina received her
Ph.D. in Ecology and Evolution at the State
University of New York, Stony Brook. Since
joining the University of Michigan in 2001,
she has overseen creation of a new
undergraduate Program in the Environment;
enhanced interdisciplinary undergraduate and graduate
teaching; tripled research activity in the School; and developed a
new M.S. track in Business, Engineering, and Natural
Resources. Prior to her appointment as Dean, she was a
member of the White House Office of Science and Technology
Policy and advisor to Vice President Al Gore. Rosina’s seminar
will address “Ecological Implications of Climate Change.” Other
less formal discussions will focus on the challenges and
opportunities of creating an interdisciplinary research, teaching,
and outreach program in natural resources and the environment.
Rosina’s visit to SNR will be February 13-14 (photo courtesy of
the University of Michigan web site).

*Dr. Gene Whitney*, Assistant Director for
the Environment, White House Office of
Science and Technology (OSTP). His work focuses on the science and technology policy aspects of earth sciences, natural hazards and disasters, energy, water, land remote sensing, environment, and natural resources. He is co-Chair of the U.S. Group on Earth Observations and is OSTP liaison to the U.S. Climate Change Science Program. He directs the Future of Land Imaging Interagency Working Group, and serves as NSTC director for the Subcommittee on Disaster Reduction and the Subcommittee on Water Availability and Quality. Gene’s seminar will address “Communicating Science to Policy Makers and the Public." He will also be meeting with faculty, staff, and students on his areas of expertise and responsibilities in OSTP. His visit will provide an excellent opportunity to discuss current and future science trends in natural resources and the environment. Gene’s visit to SNR will be April 8-9 (photo courtesy of Geotimes web site).

Both seminars have been incorporated within the Water Center/SNR seminar series during the Spring Semester.

The Immediate Future and Happy Holidays!

December and January will be busy months as we finalize the faculty evaluation season and make important decisions regarding those members of the SNR faculty applying for promotion and/or tenure. It is also the holiday season, so the next few weeks will be quite busy for all of us. Happy Holidays to all of you, and I look forward to a productive and exciting New Year in 2008.