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**Natural Resource Ecology Laboratory
Annual Review Committee
3-5 March 1999**

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Overview

The quality of its research as well as the ingenuity, enthusiasm and commitment of its staff and faculty, continue to match the salutary international reputation enjoyed by the Natural Resource Ecology Laboratory (NREL). This program brings great distinction and recognition to Colorado State University from outside the university. Internally, NREL scientists are an integral part of educational programs and a catalyst for innovative research across several colleges.

The Lab enjoys the respect and support of all of the university leaders with whom we met. Each one acknowledged the NREL's involvement in educational efforts, particularly at the graduate level as well as its important contributions to research efforts. Each indicated a willingness to work (within their own constraints) to help the NREL meet administrative and budgetary challenges. Dean Dyer's commitment to and support for the Lab remains an important element of its success.

Among those challenges is the university's current policies on cost accounting standards and the difficulty of funding administrative support within those policies. While acknowledging the issues raised by Vice President for Research and Information Technology Jud Harper, we believe the NREL as a whole, not just programs within the NREL, should be considered carefully for Complex Research Center status. By whatever mechanisms, it is essential the current uncertainties regarding staff and administrative funding be resolved.

The research productivity as well as proposed research initiatives and priorities of the NREL faculty are excellent. We especially laud the emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches and focus on connecting excellent basic work to compelling problems affecting the quality of human life and the future of our biosphere. While playing an important role in many international arenas, the NREL is also having an important impact on managed and natural ecosystems close to home.

The Staff of the NREL are enthusiastic, committed and pleased to be part of an important team. That said, they are also stressed by increasing volume of grants needed to keep pace with

Staff support will ameliorate some of this stress, but such matters as timely submission of CVs, grant drafts and budget updates will make a big difference.

Diana Wall's leadership since 1993 has been an important element in the Lab's continued success. Director Wall is admired and respected by her faculty and staff, and by her colleagues across the campus. She has done an excellent job of setting priorities for the Lab that include judicious integration into the life of the campus, while remaining focused on the Lab's primary mission of international environmental research that "applies an integrative ecosystems approach to interdisciplinary laboratory, field and simulation studies at species to global scales."

Our report is structured around our charge for this meeting which was to address three broad issues.

1. Constraints on and opportunities for funding for faculty and staff positions.
2. New and continuing research directions
3. The balance between research demands and priorities and contributions to university educational programs.

In addition to these issues, we discussed possible avenues for increased financial support to the Lab.

Constraints on and opportunities for funding for faculty and staff positions

The NREL has over the past five years generated an average of \$6.5 million in research support (direct and indirect) each year. Indeed, most of its operating funds are generated through restricted support from extramural grants. Historically, between 30-40% of indirect costs charged to grants are recovered by the NREL, with the amount determined by the Dean of the College of Natural Resources and the University. These funds are critical to meeting the NREL's administrative costs. The uncertainty associated with the exact amount of indirect cost recovery make budget planning especially challenging for the NREL Director.

Current CSU interpretations of Federal Cost Accounting Standards have placed significant constraints on the ability to fund important staff needs. In the interim, the University has provided temporary support to maintain staff levels, however, there is considerable uncertainty regarding the future of such funding.

The Advisory Committee heard conflicting views about the advisability and feasibility of the NREL being designated a Complex Research CenterCa designation that might relieve some of the funding constraints and associated uncertainties. At the very least, we feel this opportunity should be thoroughly investigated. By whatever mechanism, it is critical that the uncertainties

g be resolved soon. We do note, however, that this issue must
hole.

At the beginning of our meeting, there remained uncertainty about continued funding for positions currently held in Rangeland Ecosystem Science. We were pleased to understand that the University is committed to the filling of these positions when they become vacant. However we understand that Director Wall has not yet had a firm commitment from the University. Support for these positions is critical.

New and continuing research directions

Although we were not able to meet individually with each NREL researcher, we were treated to an overview of current research efforts and initiatives. The variety of interests represented among the faculty is considerable, and the quality and quantity of their work is excellent. There is among the faculty an entrepreneurial spirit that is key to the success of a research center such as NREL. NREL research does truly cover the range of scales and topics described in its mission statement. Furthermore, there is considerable interest in using the natural and managed ecosystems near Ft. Collins in research programs of global significance.

The proposed Center for Analysis of Carbon in Terrestrial Ecosystems (C-ACTE) within NREL is an exemplar of this interest. It is not only interdisciplinary, but it reaches out to distinguished partners across the country to create an ambitious program that will provide an inventory and monitoring of GHGs in soils, provide an integrated assessment for economic and policy analysis, support technology transfer, and provide information to stakeholders and decision makers. We are pleased to know that the University is using its good offices to support this initiative.

Research demands and contributions to university educational programs

The contributions of the NREL to the educational life of CSU are many. NREL grants fund many graduate students and post docs, and the NREL provides space for about 35 doctoral students. The Lab is also an important venue for interdisciplinary training of graduate students. The NREL lab manager spends a considerable portion of his time training students without funding for teaching, and NREL faculty whose primary support is from soft research funds participate in teaching classes and lectures in classes with no salary support.

These activities add considerable value to the university's educational enterprise, and they are also valuable to NREL. These contributions are recognized by colleagues and administrators across the campus. Nevertheless, it is important that the Lab be certain that these activities are at the very least consistent with and hopefully complementary to its overall mission. There may be opportunity, even pressure, to expand this involvement, and the Lab should consider that opportunity carefully. This may provide the means to regularize certain aspects of the Lab's



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in a position to say whether this would be appropriate, but we
University should consider this in the context of its mission and
strategic objectives.

Staff Issues

The Staff of the NREL is enthusiastic, committed and pleased to be part of an important team. That said, they are also stressed by increasing volume of grants needed to keep pace with budgetary demands. Uncertainties in funding add considerably to that stress.

Additional staff support will ameliorate some of this stress, but cooperation from the Faculty on such matters as timely submission of CVs, grant drafts and budget updates will make a big difference.

Other Sources of Funding

The mission and activities of the NREL ought to be compelling to a variety of individuals and foundations both nationally and in Colorado. That said, development activities centered on the lab are rather limited. We feel the following opportunities should be pursued.

1. Development of an "annual fund" soliciting annual support for core needs of the program. This might especially focus on individuals who have been involved over the years in the lab and a variety of possible donors with interests in the issues that the Lab's faculty is pursuing.
2. A major effort to build a core endowment, perhaps seeking a leadership gift from an individual with an interest in having their name permanently associated with the Lab.
3. Increased work to identify philanthropic foundations whose priorities match the interests in the Lab.

Any efforts of this kind will require considerable attention from the Director and support from the development staff of the College of Natural Resources and the University.

Leadership

The NREL is blessed with strong leadership. Diana is seen by her faculty as both an intellectual leader and an able administrator. The staff praise her for her willingness and ability to make hard decisions while preserving a collegial environment, and she is seen by colleagues across the campus as a leader who understands the needs of her own organizations and strives to match those with the needs of other campus units.



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ased with the support expressed by campus leaders including
d Information Technology, the Provost, the Deans of several
colleges, and relevant department heads. The value of the Lab inside and outside the University
is recognized by each of these leaders and each expressed a willingness to work with Diana to
meet NREL needs. We note that Dean Al Dyer's support remains a critical factor in the success of
the Lab. However, there is no long-term commitment for support to the Lab and Dean Dyer's
support must depend on the success of the College of Natural Resources.