

## **Moving forward with Biodiversity and the Biodiversity Institute**

January 2019

Outlined here is a set of considerations and outlook for moving forward with the Biodiversity Institute, and proceeding with a faculty task force-led planning activity for a establishing a new biodiversity research enterprise (name to be determined).

### **Biodiversity Institute: approach for FY 2019 and FY 2020**

1. The Biodiversity Institute will continue its operations, including its outreach activities. For the remainder of FY 2019, funds to support it will be derived from remaining BI resources. As these funds are exhausted, the remaining support for this fiscal year will come from unspent unrestricted operating funds assigned to the Office of Research and Economic Development. For FY 2020, the funding approach is being developed in the ongoing budgeting exercise.
2. A new director for the Biodiversity Institute has been appointed. Professor Brent Ewers, Botany Department and Wyoming EPSCoR Director, has agreed to assume this position. He replaces Dr. Gary Beauvais, who has ably served as interim director of the BI. His service and professionalism is greatly appreciated, including and especially during this most recent challenging period.

For the remainder of FY 2019, in addition to directing the BI, Professor Ewers will also lead a new planning activity with a faculty task force to establish a new biodiversity research enterprise, with title of Biodiversity Director. Envisioned is that the Biodiversity Institute will assume the role as the outreach and education arm of this new center, with a heightened coupling of this outreach to leading biodiversity research being carried out at UW. Aspects of this are described below.

Funding for the Biodiversity Institute in FY 2019 will be derived from remaining BI funds and, once they are used, unspent unrestricted operating funds from the Office of Research and Economic Development Budget. The BI will also be budgeted in the FY 2020 request for the university.

Professor Ewers activities and considerations going forward in this planning activity and his BI directorship include the following:

**1) Guiding the Biodiversity Institute through a transition phase and leading the establishment of a new biodiversity research enterprise** – The process for appointing Professor Ewers as Director of the Biodiversity Institute is underway. As Director, he will be an integral part of the transition team for the Biodiversity Institute and will work directly with the VPRED, President, Provost, and Board of Trustees as needed. This plan for transition will have as an overarching goal the establishment of a new campus-wide biodiversity research enterprise,, to be administered from the Berry Biodiversity Conservation Center building. The administration will request endorsement from the Board of Trustees in January 2019 of Professor Ewers directing the planning and operations of the new research enterprise, with his new title of Biodiversity Director.

**2) Establishing and leading a Biodiversity Task Force to create a campus-wide plan for biodiversity research and outreach** – As Biodiversity Director, Professor Ewers will lead the establishment of a Biodiversity Task Force, with final membership and charge approved by the VPRED, President and Provost. The Task force will have a clear mandate, time frame, and set of resources to ensure the highest likelihood of success and the task force will be clearly faculty informed and led. The members of the Task Force shall include (1) the Biodiversity Director (chair), (2) a Foundation Officer assigned as a point of contact with ORED, (3) a Trustee (to be named), (4) the Dean or member of the leadership of the Haub School, (5) the director or member of the leadership of WyGIS, (6) faculty nationally known for biodiversity research that includes those hired to interface with the Biodiversity Institute and from the departments of Botany and Zoology and Physiology, b) additional faculty members from departments with crucial biodiversity research expertise including those from the departments of Botany, Zoology and Physiology, and Ecosystem Science and Management (ESM). The charge for the Task Force shall address items described below, as well as the history and need for a biodiversity research center at UW.

Moreover, the charge will include a request to identify resource requirements in the near and long term for running meetings, gathering input, travel to visit institutions and for bringing invited scholars to UW relevant to the charge. The institution and scholar visits will have a goal of enhancing external UW partnerships with other universities, research institutions, non-profits, corporations, and government entities that are regionally, nationally, and internationally relevant to the new enterprise's mission and vision. The near-term request will be shared with the VPRED early in the planning process and will include resources for stimulating biodiversity research and novel interactions between research and outreach, taking the outreach activities outside of southeast Wyoming, and updating apps and databases directly related to biodiversity research. The charge will provide a clear mechanism for potential reorganization of people, space, and resourcing to support pursuit of a new vision for the campus-wide biodiversity enterprises, one that derives its focus from cutting-edge biodiversity research, with outreach and education that is directly related and flows from research.

**3) Evaluating and potentially redefining BI staff positions** – Motivated by clear outcomes at the national research mission level as well as the potential work of the Biodiversity Task Force, the job descriptions of the Biodiversity Institute staff will be assessed and potentially recast. This will take place collaboratively with BI staff. Clear directions from the National Science Foundation indicate that research intellectual merit and broader impacts must be directly tied to each other and the revised Biodiversity Institute will only thrive and achieve state, regional, and national status through such a model.

**4) Positioning UW to hire outstanding faculty, stimulate research, strengthen connections between research and outreach, and create new partnerships** - Biodiversity research and outreach at UW will only achieve its vision if appropriate investments are made in personnel and resources through three investment areas: faculty hires, Berry Biodiversity Conservation Center building operations, and private fund raising.

The first investment area is faculty hires. Given the recent history of outstanding hires by Wyoming EPSCoR across two different Track 1 projects, Professor Ewers is well-positioned to lead departments in faculty hires. The charge to the Task Force in item 2 will include proposing a mechanism to make a five position cluster hire in Biodiversity through faculty retirements over two years following the final acceptance and implementation of the Biodiversity Task Force report. A request for proposals will be developed by the signatories of this letter with direct input by the Task Force. The RFP will establish a process for all departments at UW to compete for these faculty hires. The competition criteria will be driven first by the research mission of the new biodiversity enterprise with clear connections to the outreach and education portion of the current Biodiversity Institute. The Biodiversity Director, VPRED, Provost, and President agree to operate in good faith towards this outcome.

A second key investment is in operation of the new biodiversity enterprise to include staffing, research stimulation, outreach, and support of Berry Biodiversity Conservation Center building operations. To be considered will be reassignments of UW state funds. This will require reconsideration of priorities presently supported by state funds, owing to funding constraints, and application of funds acquired through recovery of indirect costs (IDCs). Generous return of IDCs to the Center will follow as Center operations mature. Such returns will be tied to the productivity of researchers and the establishing of new relationships with core facilities both on campus and in the field. These relationships may include other entities at UW such as the Science Initiative, NSF EPSCoR, Haub School, School of Energy Resources as determined by the Biodiversity Task Force report. Such arrangements may also include those with external UW partners in research and outreach.

A third crucial investment is in private fund raising. To move fundraising forward in an outcomes-driven way, the Biodiversity Director, supported by ORED, and a Foundation officer appointed to ORED are moving forward with a clear common understanding that the biodiversity enterprise leadership, Foundation Representatives, and ORED are committed to open communication, identifying common goals, transparency of budgets and business models, and developing and pursuing a strategy to pursue all feasible funding options. Moreover, the VPRED and Provost will help guide the Biodiversity Director and the Foundation representative in identifying synergistic opportunities for fundraising with respect to other Biodiversity relevant entities of UW.

**5) Optimizing occupation of the Berry Conservation Center building in the context of the strategic research, education, and outreach interests of UW** - The current Biodiversity Institute (outreach staff and programs) and Berry Conservation Center (building) are completely intertwined in both mission and space occupation, but their relationship is not clear in reality or perception. This has created issues with use of the building space by not just the BI and its programs, but also other entities such as the Wyoming Natural Diversity Database (WyNDD), the Program in Ecology (PiE), Wyoming EPSCoR, the Stable Isotope Facility (SIF), Departments of Zoology and Physiology and Botany, and the Museum of Vertebrates. For long term research and outreach space needs, the Biodiversity Director will be tasked by the VPRED and Provost to evaluate the use of all of the space in the building with respect to the new biodiversity enterprise's research mission that will be articulated by the Biodiversity Task Force. The Biodiversity Director will write a report that provides the logic for the intermediate and long term occupation of the building and will work to implement and improve this plan with the Facilities Council and its

leadership (the Provost and VP for Finance and Administration), as part of a larger effort to develop and execute a longer range strategic vision for campus facility use.

The Biodiversity Director will work directly with the VPRED, Provost, and President to define how the new biodiversity research enterprise will serve as an umbrella organization that engages all campus entities with a stake in biodiversity research. Moreover, execution of the Biodiversity Institute outreach mission will be redefined to be strongly anchored in the new enterprise's research mission and vision. The Biodiversity Director will execute on a vision in which the Berry Biodiversity Conservation Center Building will capture the Building's potential as a convening center for outreach activities and that will be anchored to the biodiversity research enterprise's mission and vision. Finally, the Director will consider these goals in developing the space evaluation as outlined in the first part of this item.

**6) Using biodiversity research and outreach as a model for articulating the value of the UW research mission** - Currently, the research mission of UW and its clear impacts on the state, region, nation and world is often not widely understood by the UW campus, nor stakeholders. A Research Strategic planning and grand challenge identification process is about to begin led by the Provost and VPRED. The Biodiversity Director will be tasked with helping coordinate how Biodiversity research fits into the core strategic and internationally recognized research areas of Ecology and Evolution at UW. The Biodiversity Director will promote the use of the biodiversity research enterprise as a model for communicating the outcomes of research and directly related outreach to all of these stakeholders of the UW research mission. Biodiversity is an especially apropos model because of the clear ties to the sense of place and economic potential of Wyoming. The Biodiversity Director will work directly with the VPRED, Provost and President to accomplish this goal and will have resources made available to do so.