

September 15, 2016, 13:30-15:00 EDT Webinar

Polar Programs Subcommittee (PLR SC) participants: W. Berry Lyons* (Subcommittee Chair), Stefanie Brachfeld, James Dixon,* Tom Neumann, Greg Sullivan,* and Jeff Welker (*designates subcommittee members who are members of the full AC GEO). Paul Bierman of the full AC GEO also participated.

National Science Foundation Division of Polar Programs (NSF PLR) participants: Kelly Falkner (Director, PLR), William Ambrose, Scot Arnold, Andrew Backe, Scott Borg, Paul Cutler, Terri Edillon, Dan King, Maggie Knuth, Sue LaFratta, Nature McGinn, Julie Palais, Polly Penhale, Kate Ruck, Eric Saltzman, Paul Sheppard, Simon Stephenson, Marc Stieglitz, Neil Swanberg, Peter West, and William Wiseman.

Discussion Notes

The agenda developed by PLR senior staff and the subcommittee chair was outlined in a set of power point slides provided to all invitees prior to the webinar. The discussion began with a roll call. The main webinar agenda items reviewed were as follows:

1) PLR Staffing Update

Kelly Falkner referred participants to a slide outlining updates in PLR Staffing, including departures, additions, pending selections, and details:

Departures

- Sonya Lyatsky* - Astrophysics & Geospace Assistant Program Director
- George Blaisdell – Chief Program Manager, AIL

Additions

- Jon Fentress - Safety & Health Officer
- Kate Ruck* - Science Assistant for Arctic Sciences
- Masauda Barakat - Pathways Administrative Support Trainee
- Terri Edillon - Communications Specialist
- Jennifer Mercer** – Arctic Research Support & Logistics Program Manager (backfill for R. Crain)
- William Scott Carr - PESH Management & Program Analyst (start date 19-SEP-16)
- Cynthia Suchman - Arctic Natural Sciences Program Director (start date 3-OCT-16)
- Frank Rack – Arctic Research Support & Logistics Program Manager (start date 17-OCT-16)
- Anjuli Bamzai - Arctic Natural Sciences Program Director (start date 14-NOV-16)
- Jeremy Rusin – NOAA Intern (start date TBD; estimated late Nov/early Dec)

Pending Selections

- Aviation Program Manager (selection made; firm offer pending)
- Arctic Research Support & Logistics Program Manager (selection made; firm offer pending)
- Facilities Construction & Maintenance Manager (Human Resources Management preparing referral list)
- Chief Program Manager, AIL (Human Resources Management preparing referral list)

On Detail

- Renee Crain- Policy Advisor & Executive Secretary, Arctic Executive Steering Committee, OSTP
- Karen Sloane - Program Specialist, NSF Travel Office

* Indicates either IPA/Rotators or Federal temporary personnel

** Indicates contractor personnel

II) COV Responses

Simon Stephenson reported the status of the Committee of Visitor's (COV) Response for Arctic Sciences. He noted that, overall, the COV's review was very positive. The COV Response acknowledges that dwell time is an issue. ARC will have taken action on all the proposals from the 2016 cycle, with the exception of recent submissions. Another issue that was noted in the COV Report is out-year commitments. Simon Stephenson remarked that there may have been a misunderstanding based on the information presented to the COV and information is provided in the response that shows that out-year commitments for ARC programs are within NSF guidance.

Eric Saltzman reported the status of the COV Response for Antarctic Sciences. Citing from the COV Report, he noted that the COV "was very impressed with the quality, thoroughness, and integrity of the merit review process in the Antarctic (ANT) Section." Some issues addressed in the COV Response include: 1) uniformity of documentation of PD/PI discussions, 2) reviewer pool "breadth," 3) new investigator recruitment, and 4) organizational barriers to polar/extra-polar or "teleconnections" research.

PLR is iterating with the GEO OAD and expects to share responses with the COV chairs and liaisons and larger committee shortly.

III) NERC Update

Eric Saltzman reported on the initiative between NSF and the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) of the Research Councils UK (RCUK) and the British Antarctic Survey (BAS). The initiative currently focuses on the future of Thwaites Glacier. The initiative answers to one of the key areas in the NAS 2015 report, "A Strategic Vision for NSF Investments in Antarctic and Southern Ocean Research," and has been a subject of UK and US workshops in 2015 and 2016. A solicitation is under development and targeted for release in fall 2016. The initiative includes an integrated process for submission, review, and logistics for a research program that will take place over a five-year period (FY18-23) with major field seasons occurring in FY19/20 and FY20/21. Tom Neumann and Jeff Welker positively commented on the initiative and encouraged coordination between NSF, NERC and BAS for sharing responsibilities for logistics and project management.

IV) Arctic Science Ministerial

Simon Stephenson reviewed plans for the upcoming Arctic Science Ministerial, to be held on September 28, 2016. The White House has set up a blog for the event, which can be accessed at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2016/05/13/white-house-arctic-science-ministerial-september-28-2016>. Approximately 24 Countries and the EU are expected to be in attendance. The NSF Director, Dr. France Córdova, is co-chair, along with Dr. John Holdren and Fran Ulmer. Four integrated themes under discussion at the event are:

- Theme I: Identifying Arctic-Science Challenges and their Regional and Global Implications
- Theme II: Strengthening and Integrating Arctic Observations and Data-Sharing
- Theme III: Applying Expanded Scientific Understanding of the Arctic to Build Regional Resilience and to Shape Global Responses
- Theme IV: Empowering Citizens through Science Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Education Leveraging Arctic Science

Kelly Falkner noted that the event presents a great opportunity to highlight the Arctic and PLR looks forward to reporting outcomes at the upcoming AC GEO in October. Jeff Welker asked whether there will be live feeds from the event so that the public can observe. Simon Stephenson noted that there will not be as this is a working meeting. Kelly Falkner noted that on September 29, 2016, the NAS Polar Research Board will hold an event—“Scientific Priorities for a Changing Arctic”—that will review the Arctic Science Ministerial and is open to the public. (Details about the event and registration information can be found at: <http://dels.nas.edu/Upcoming-Event/Science-Priorities-Changing-Arctic/AUTO-7-89-17-G>). A number of other events are also being held in Washington DC in association with the ministerial as noted on the White House Blog. Committee members expressed their encouragement of this event.

V) No-deadline Solicitations

Simon Stephenson reported on the status of the no-deadline solicitation in the Arctic Sciences Section (ARC). The solicitation was recently released (NSF 16-595: <http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2016/nsf16595/nsf16595.pdf>). Under this solicitation, proposals are accepted anytime. There will be rolling ad-hoc reviews and the use of panels. The AON and Arctic Social Science programs are targeting to have one panel a year. Other programs anticipate more than one panel a year. Some challenges to using the no-deadline solicitation include: 1) potentially lengthened dwell-times, 2) how to make the best use of reviewers, and 3) how to line up budget cycles and field work planning. Expected benefits for program directors include decreased proposal loads and increase in the quality of proposals. The ability to turn around a proposal may prove particularly beneficial to early career investigators with tenure clocks ticking. Committee members reacted favorably to this news. Paul Bierman suggested that the fall AC GEO meeting be used in part to develop a plan to keep tabs on the outcome of this major change.

VI) Arctic DEM

Simon Stephenson reported on the status of the Arctic DEM. NSF recently published a press release on the project (http://www.nsf.gov/news/news_summ.jsp?cntn_id=189516). The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) published a similar press release that includes numerous images (<https://www.nga.mil/MediaRoom/PressReleases/Pages/Arctic3DAAlaska.aspx>). The media picked up on the story and numerous pieces appeared in the popular press. The Alaska DEM has been developed, and the data released. A Pan-Arctic DEM is under development and will be released next year. Simon Stephenson noted that the Polar Geospatial Center (PGC) group has data available from the DEM and can provide assistance in their use by the research community. He also noted that the DEM offers a means to measure and project change in glaciers and the landscape. Scott Borg noted that an MOU of PLR with NGA has recently been concluded that extends arrangements for access to NGA purchased imagery for civilian science purposes. The PLR subcommittee is encouraged to make the availability of the DEM data broadly known to their respective communities.

Polar Programs Subcommittee of GEO Advisory Committee

VII) Infectious Diseases

Sue LaFratta reported that the pre-deployment flu shots and general wellness checks to avoid introducing contagious illnesses into Polar Regions will continue. New requirements for tuberculosis screening and measles vaccination have been added. Additionally, on-site quarantine processes are in place for Antarctic stations.

VIII) PLR Director's Remarks

Kelly Falkner reported on the status of a number of issues:

A) Status of PLR Merger Review: Input to the review committee is completed and they are working on their report. The NSF Director will review and expects to report her decision to the National Science Board (NSB) meeting being held on November 8-9.

B) Lockheed-to-Leidos Transition: Lockheed has formally spun-off its IS&GS division which holds the U.S. Antarctic Support Contract (ASC) operations to Leidos. Formal transition of the contract to the new entity known as novation is currently under review by government representatives. No major impact is expected on operations.

C) Antarctic Infrastructure Modernization for Science (AIMS) Update (reported by Scot Arnold): AIMS will undergo a 35% Preliminary Design Review (PDR) in early December. Some components have been removed from the initial AIMS plan, such as lodging and the Palmer Pier and will be pursued by other means. The goal remains to request AIMS funding beginning in the FY19 budget.

D) Recent South Pole Medevac: The mid-winter Medevac was well-coordinated and successful. Peter West discussed the usefulness of social media (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) in providing updates to the public and media.

E) Potential Topics for Polar SC Breakout Session at the upcoming AC GEO (October 19-20, 2016): Several topics were identified: 1) harassment in polar science (poising ourselves as a research community to continue to proactively deal with this issue); 2) vertebrate research in Antarctica; 3) development of a plan to monitor and report-out on the efficacy/impacts of the Arctic Sciences Section no-deadline solicitation; and 4) overview of outcomes of Arctic Science Ministerial.

Action Item

1) Andrew Backe will work with the Polar SC chair and PLR Senior Staff to develop an agenda for the breakout session of the upcoming AC GEO.