

To: RMBL scientists, students, and other stakeholders
From: Ian Billick
Re: Review of 2017 Annual Operations
Date: 10/2/17

Why we assess operations

We assess operations in order to identify and prioritize changes we will make in the upcoming year. We review those planned changes during the budget process and at the beginning of the summer. Prioritization is a critical part of the process since we have limited staff and time. We will be finalizing the budget in November, so if you have feedback on this document, please let me know by the end of October if the feedback potentially involves budgeting. I will be out of the office Oct. 5-19th, but available to talk by phone upon my return. Email feedback is welcome at any time.

How we assess operations

In addition to the online exit survey (we had 24 respondents), we conducted exit interviews with 21 people. Additionally, we also rely upon staff observations and informal conversations.

How people can provide feedback

We strongly encourage participation in the online exit survey. If you would like to provide additional feedback or feedback at a different time, please contact Gesa or myself.

The most effective feedback is specific, actionable, linked to our mission, and is placed within a larger context. We are happy to work with you to help make your feedback more effective, or to help you understand why some feedback generated more of a response on our part.

Typically, the most difficult part of the process is prioritizing items. By providing this summary of our assessment, we are actively encouraging you to provide feedback on our analysis and prioritization. If you have feedback on this memo, which can include but does not need to be limited to items you think we have missed, feedback on how we have analyzed the information we have received, or how we have prioritized our responses, please contact me directly.

Progress on Goals set for 2017

In 2016 we set eight primary goals for 2017. Below I note those goals and summarize progress.

- 1. Strengthen efforts to support diverse community, including putting a diversity statement on the website and having a diversity liaison.** We put a diversity statement up on the website and established a diversity liaison. The diversity committee was active this summer.
- 2. Set and communicate consistent policy about access to shop and tools.** We created a space for community storage of tools. We heard no complaints.

3. **Provide more opportunities for RA's to integrate into community.** We hosted research assistants at an early summer dinner and discussion. We established a liaison from the research assistant community. We received feedback that research assistants would like more integration.
4. **Continue to upgrade cabins and identify ways to accommodate more seasonal employees with onsite housing without cutting into capacity for students and scientists.** We used a tent to house seasonal employees. It was successful enough that we will continue to use it in the future. The only people that did not receive Gothic housing this summer were people who requested housing for short-term stays. We remain concerned that demand for summer housing will continue to grow and that it will be harder for people, both scientists and staff, to find housing off-site.
5. **Continue improvements to the internet, including extending coverage to outlying opportunities and pursuing opportunities, if they arise, to increase bandwidth on a cost effective basis.** We increased bandwidth by 33%. We extended coverage to outlying areas including the cabins around Weekley Cabin and Willey cabin. Running hardlines to extend coverage in areas with trees proved to be successful. We also upgraded our firewall because with the increased bandwidth it became a constriction point. While the Internet generally worked well, we continued to have problems during peak periods before dinner and in some locations.

Assessment of 2017 Operations

We felt that summer operations went well, particularly given the transition in facilities staff. All respondents to the survey (100%) strongly agreed or agreed that operations went smoothly. In person interviews supported the sense that people are generally happy with operations.

We experienced substantial winter damage associated with unusually heavy and wet snows in deep winter. A number of cabin decks were damaged, the warming experiment was damaged, and we lost the bridge across the East River. With the transition in physical plant staff and with a limited budget, we were constrained in our ability to respond to this winter damage. Currently we do not have a sufficient budget to fully support all equipment and buildings that we have in place. Additionally, we continue to see creep in the level of service we are expected to provide. Managing expectations for basic maintenance will be important until we can increase investment in operations.

Goals for 2017

Some of the issues identified below result from feedback about things that we need to improve. Other issues result from more long-term thinking about how we can improve management of the operations. Implementation of all of the items below is contingent upon developing the 2018 budget and subject to availability of staff time. In other words, some items on this list will not be implemented.

1. Encourage more feedback concerning wireless. While we got general reports that the system was not working as we as it should, we got little actionable information that we could use to diagnose the problems.
2. Provide more information to scientists concerning IT, including information for making skype calls and using the board room.
3. Stronger enforcement of parking. We received several complaints about people abusing the system.
4. Provide stronger orientation concerning human-wildlife interactions, including how to respond to bats in cabins.
5. Provide more training for working safely in field settings.
6. Create greater transparency for tracking responses to work crew requests.
7. Provide the community more timely information about groups visiting during the summer.

Additional Items

Undergraduate Education: Rosemary Smith will oversee the Education program next summer. This is meant to free up some of Jennie's time. Rachel Steward will coordinate the undergraduate research program. Ross will continue to teach Research training in wildlife biology. Scott Solomon from Rice University will teach Methods in field ecology.

Gas Chromatograph-Mass Spectrometer: This equipment has been successfully installed. We will offer a course in its use Aug. 12-18, 2018.

New Cabin: We have funding for a new four season cabin. It will be just north of the driveway leading down to crystal cabin. We will start construction next summer and finish it the following summer. Next fall we intend to remove crystal cabin and put a new leach field in its place.

Shoulder Season Use: Next year we will host the Mountain Climate meetings Sept. 17-21. There will also be a Univ. of Ottawa field course at RMBL Aug. 11-25.

Staffing: We anticipate adding some staff in 2018 to help manage the increased number of users going through RMBL.