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President and Chair's Annual Report to the RMBL Community July 3, 2019

1. Current board priorities

North Village Campus

Consistent with our efforts over the past few years we continue to move forward with planning for a RMBL facility in Mt. CB in the vicinity of the Snodgrass trail head. This year-round facility would include housing, office and lab space, and a visitor's center. Although initial planning and geotechnical surveys were focused on a site above the current Snodgrass parking, it is currently unclear whether we will move forward with this site, and we are actively exploring other nearby options.

We have several key goals for this project:

- Reduce housing pressure in Gothic in general, and specifically to give us the flexibility to prioritize Gothic housing for uses that best serve our mission.
- Provide year-round lab space for research and educational programming.
- Create opportunities for off-season conferences, postdocs and sabbatical visitors.
- Provide permanent, functional winter office space for staff.
- Shift public visitation away from Gothic and provide capacity to manage public visitation to the East River Valley if this is the goal of Gunnison Valley community.

It is critical to our planning that once completed, this facility will be revenue neutral or positive to overall RMBL finances, including the costs of the facility depreciation and any additional associated with staffing. Accordingly, we are developing conservative financial models to make this assessment and inform the design and programming of the facility.

Capital campaign

The Board has adopted a strategic plan ([link](#)) with the goal of attaining the following vision:

The Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory (RMBL) will unleash the power of place to transform how we understand the world and provide the scientific knowledge needed to maintain the environmental processes that support food security, air and water quality and human health.

At a high level the goals of the strategic plan are to:

1. Increase the number of scientists, retain and recruit the leading environmental scientists, and foster decadal-long research programs.
2. Create novel research opportunities by creating a data-rich and interactive environment that promotes synthesis and collaboration.
3. Translate science to public benefit.
4. Build a sustainable financial model.

To achieve these goals, we are preparing to engage in an ambitious capital campaign with the following fundraising goals:

1. \$10 million in endowment gifts through estate planning received over the next several decades.
2. \$9 million for a campus in Mt. Crested Butte, including research and office space, a visitor's center and transit center, and housing.
3. \$5 million in endowment gifts received within the next five years.
4. \$3 million for upgrades to Gothic campus
5. \$1 million for supporting collaboration and synthesis
6. \$1 million for reserves
7. \$1 million for staff capacity, fundraising and contingency

We are actively assessing the feasibility of these ambitious campaign goals, and this depends critically on getting several large lead gifts from the board and community. Accordingly, one of our key goals is identifying potential board members with high financial capacity.

Internal communication

The RMBL is in a period of rapid change. Recognizing the challenges this presents, the Board recently convened a committee to explore new mechanisms to foster interaction and by-directional information flow between the Board and the RMBL community. The committee identified three goals:

1. Enhance communication between RMBL scientists and the non-scientists board members.
2. Improve understanding by members of the community (scientists, non-scientist corporation members and RMBL staff) of what the board does and how it operates.
3. Provide an alternative to the disbanded Corporation Meeting, which is no longer required by the bylaws.

It in turn identified the following strategies:

1. Trustee – scientist meals: Lab staff will coordinate social meals between trustees and interested community members.
2. Trustee field trips: Lab staff will coordinate opportunities for non-scientist board members to go out in the field with a RMBL scientist to assist with and see research in action.
3. Other social event: Social events aimed at the community engaging in Q&A with both current trustees as well as with future candidates for the Board.
4. Communications from Board leadership: The Board President and Chair will provide an Annual Report from the RMBL President and Chair (this document) as well as reports summarizing key outcomes of each board meeting (summer, fall, winter).

In addition, the committee identified the need to assess whether the above strategies serve as an adequate replacement for an annual corporation meeting (which is no longer required by the bylaws).

Gothic upgrades

The ADA cabin will be completed this Fall. Other substantial upgrades including cabin and washhouse replacement will be contingent upon future funding.

Data management

We continue to explore new technologies and strategies for archiving data and a spatial modeling platform. Moving forward with such advances will be contingent upon future funding.

Financial sustainability

As part of planning for the capital campaign we are working to develop conservative financial models that will allow us to make strategic decisions, including the development of a North Village campus. If we move forward with the campaign, two of our key goals are to raise funds to increase cash reserves to \$1M and to build our endowment.

2. Current finances

Our finances continue to run on razor's edge. For example, although we run a \$1.7M annual budget, each fall we dip down to as low as \$100k in cash reserves, and we have little in the way of reserves for the replacement of equipment and buildings. We have added a bit to endowment, including endowments to support graduate students and scientists. We continue to explore putting a conservation easement on townsite as way of increasing reserves.

3. Changes in board

The composition of the Board ([link](#)) is constantly shifting as trustee terms expire and new trustees are brought on. Current RMBL scientists serving on the board are Kailen Mooney, Dan Blumstein, Diane Campbell, Aimee Classen, Ken Williams and Jill Anderson. We seek to maintain a pipeline of qualified and interested individuals for the board, including both active RMBL scientists and non-scientists. We always have a range of considerations. The board must include a variety of skill sets, including science, legal, financial, institutional leadership, and philanthropy. Within the active RMBL scientists on the board we seek to include individuals at different career stages and with different research approaches and priorities. Finally, we seek to have the board reflect the diversity of the community it serves. Checking all of these boxes within a small pool of individuals is challenging, but we do our best.

This summer, Dan Blumstein will take the reins as President while Kailen Mooney remains on to support Dan for an additional year. One key priority going forward is continuity of leadership, with the explicit goal of having individuals within the positions of Vice President and Vice Chair to serve under and learn from the current President and Chair as their terms conclude. We are also in the process of identifying new trustees who can assist with fundraising as we move into our ambitious campaign.

4. Overview of RMBL 2018 season

Due to the earlier snowmelt, more teams arrived earlier than in previous years. This, plus the threat s from fire presented a number of operational challenges. The number of new research projects was up by about 7% percent; there were 92 research plans in 2017 and 99 research plans in 2018. Science highlights in 2018 included an overflight campaign in June, where airborne multi-spectral imagery was collected concurrently with on the ground soil and plant measurements. This was a massive interdisciplinary collaboration and impressive field campaign. Three snow science research groups funded by the Department of Energy started projects this winter. Having active research in deep winter is an exciting development that lengthens our research season. The education program was strong. Eleven college students were authors on publications in 2018. A Denver school visited for day programming this fall and Delta high school visited for one day in each of 2017 and 2018. We also had an inquiry form Colorado College to bring a class here for 7-10 days in the winter of 2020. Demand for year-round science education is strong.