

Board President's and Chair's Annual Report to the RMBL Community June 21, 2022

Greetings and for those of you at RMBL now or coming later in the summer, welcome!

As part of our ongoing effort to keep our community connected to the RMBL Board of Trustees, we write to provide you with an update on recent accomplishments and future plans. 2021 was another terrific year. Last summer, with only minor disruption due to COVID protocols, we operated close to normal without an outbreak. We had terrific financial results, set a record for research days, continued to make progress on achieving the goals of our strategic plan and took advantage of opportunities to advance land conservation and expand research capability.

Financial Update

RMBL's capacity to support science has grown significantly over the last 5 years. Over this period, the operating budget has grown by over \$1 million driven by rapid growth in philanthropy, income associated with handling of research grants and contracts and fees from instrumentation projects. Throughout this period, we have kept user fee increases to cost of living or less and we have increased fellowship support. The key to RMBL's progress has been to generate revenue growth while controlling costs and investing in staff and technology where there is an opportunity for either financial or programmatic growth. Aided by SAIL and SPLASH revenues as well as another installment of PPP support, RMBL generated an operating surplus of \$540,000, a result that will allow us to bridge the seasonal cash shortfall that occurs annually in the second quarter.

While these results were spectacular, windfalls such as these should not be expected in the future. SAIL and SPLASH will end no later than mid-2023, and there will be no further PPP support which has sustained us for the past two years. Inflation, economic uncertainty, labor shortages and supply chain disruptions complicate forecasting expenditures. All of this has been considered in the 2022 budget which forecasts a small surplus and appropriate adjustments will be made as the situation warrants.

Research Activity

Research activity in 2021 exceeded pre-pandemic levels. The number of projects and scientists working at RMBL equaled the record previously set in 2019. User days exceeded 2019 and set record highs despite ongoing challenges with international and domestic travel. Increased research activity has translated into increased research productivity. At a rate of 50 articles a year, the publication rate is substantially higher than it was a decade ago.

A major addition to research activities, the Department of Energy Sail (Surface Atmospheric Integrated Laboratory) campaign began operations in September of 2021 and will run through June 2023, bringing instruments measuring precipitation, aerosols, clouds, winds, radiation, temperature and humidity to quantify major atmospheric processes impacting mountain hydrology. The SAIL observatory has attracted other research teams including a team from NOAA as well as other scientists.

In 2022 research is projected to continue record growth with the addition of new projects and a flood of new graduate students. Fellowships for graduate students and professional scientists are one of the ways RMBL supports scientists and their research programs. RMBL doubled fellowship support in 2021 and we added additional fellowship funds in 2022.

One question we get asked is whether we are trying to drive growth, and if so, how much growth do we anticipate? We are not trying to drive growth at RMBL; we have increased the quality and diversity of services we offer to researchers, and at the same time, we have kept user fees at or below inflation. Thus, demand is increasing. We are paying close attention to how that growth impacts the community.

Diversity and Inclusion

The Board of Trustees is committed to assuring a welcoming and inclusive community that values diversity, promotes belonging and embraces an environment where members have a reasonable expectation of physical, emotional and cultural safety. In 2019 before Covid the board formed a Diversity committee to develop a plan that fulfills its commitment. The board has worked shoulder to shoulder with the community committee in this work. For the past two summers, the combined committees developed a climate survey that was distributed to all community members in order to identify areas of concern. The responses now form the scaffolding for the organization to address issues identified in the responses. Additionally, the committee is in the final stages of developing goals and objectives for improving community diversity. Before the plan is finalized, the committee will socialize the goals, objectives and tactics with the community over the summer. The board anticipates that the plan will be a critical addition to the overall strategic plan for RMBL.

Progress on the Strategic Plan

Creating a Data Rich Environment

The backbone of the strategic plan is the spatial data platform which is intended to create a data rich environment that takes advantage of long-term data sets that are of value in current research by RMBL scientists as well as innovations in sensor technology and data informatics. Through the efforts of Dr. Ian Breckheimer, RMBL is currently offering curation services to scientists to encourage data sharing and archiving, typically adding one significant long-term data set a year. This year RMBL is using funds of around \$15,000 to incentivize archiving high priority data. Ian has developed an online data catalog and data products to support data discovery.

Education

On the education front, NSF funded 10 additional REU students for a total of 22, a dramatic increase from the past grants funding 10-12 students. In response to declining student applications, particularly among Hispanics and other underserved communities which experienced serious setbacks in the pandemic, RMBL is devoting significant resources this summer to fund students from these communities. For youth science education, in 2021 RMBL returned to K-8 programs after cancelling them in 2020. The number of programs will be increased this summer. RMBL is working to add high school student programs in the shoulder seasons.

North Village

In 2021 RMBL and NVA (North Village Associates) completed the PUD (Planned Unit Development) application which was submitted to the town of Mt. Crested Butte for approval. The PUD includes plans for the RMBL campus including year-round housing as well as labs and administrative offices. The board approved a sustainability plan for that campus with the goal of being carbon neutral, minimizing wastewater and preserving the natural habitat. The PUD is presently under review by the Mt. Crested Butte Planning Commission which is expected to make its recommendation to the town council sometime this year. Progress has been slow, and sometimes frustrating, but North Village is a significant project, and a complicated timeline was expected.

Strategic Plan Update

The current Strategic Plan was finalized in 2018. Good planning requires periodic review and accordingly the process of reviewing and revising the plan is about to begin. The Board has formed a committee to complete the review and recommend revisions by the fall board meeting. The entire plan will be reviewed for modification, deletion and addition of goals. Among the topics to be considered for addition are diversity, year-round K-12 programming, offsite housing for staff and scientists and development of a land acquisition strategy. The committee is chaired by Kailen Mooney. Getting input and buy-in from the community is an essential part of the process and it is anticipated there will be ample opportunity for members of the community to share their views this summer.

Final Thoughts

2022 is an exciting time to be at RMBL. There is a lot going on and all of it is positive. After two summers of operations impacted by the pandemic, we are back to normal and fully operational this summer. There has been spectacular recovery in the number of scientists working, research days and discovery. The kind of science being done has been expanded and diversified. SAIL and SPLASH at RMBL have received national attention. The Spatial Data Project has taken off and offers great new research tools to scientists. Staff additions have been fully integrated and are enhancing performance. Our donor base is growing, and their generosity is the rocket fuel propelling our success. Stay tuned and we hope to see you around if you're on campus this summer.

Sincerely Yours,

Daniel T. Blumstein, President RMBL Board of Trustees
Bruce McLean, Chair RMBL Board of Trustees