CHARTER
OF THE
BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEM INFORMATICS
WORK GROUP SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS (SES)
COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES (CENR)
NATIONAL SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL

A. Official Designation

The Work group on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Informatics (BioEco) is hereby renewed by action of the National Science and Technology Council, Committee on Environment and Natural Resources.

B. Purpose

There is a wealth of information relating to biodiversity and ecosystem processes that resides in diverse Federal, State and local government agencies and tribal organizations; in non-government organizations such as universities, museums, herbaria and botanical gardens, zoos, libraries, corporations and conservation organizations; and in other nations and international organizations. At the same time, the current computing environment offers numerous technological opportunities that can greatly increase our ability to access, understand, share, compare, exchange, and use this information. In this context, "biodiversity and ecosystem informatics" is defined as including the information content, as well as the systems, standards, information services, and technologies needed to develop, access, deliver, integrate and apply information. It also includes a human dimension/social science component that relates to human understanding and use of information.

There are a number of Federal agency programs and activities aimed at making biodiversity and ecosystem information more broadly accessible for various applications and increased interoperability among entities. Efforts to provide greater access, cross-linkage, and coordination of this information are also underway among State, local and non-government organizations. The CENR Subcommittee on Ecological Systems (SES) focal point provides an ideal venue for communication, coordination, and leveraging of Federal activities in this area through its Biodiversity and Ecosystem Informatics Work Group.

BioEco's focus to improve coordination of Federal biodiversity and ecosystem informatics activities involves the definition of common goals and objectives in this area, identification of common interests and priorities, and promotion of the pooling or sharing of agency resources, including expertise, funds, or funding vehicles such as contracts, cooperative agreements, and peer review granting programs. One current example of the advantages of such Federal interagency cooperation is the Integrated Taxonomic Information System (ITIS), the standardized database on scientific nomenclature and taxonomy of North American plant and animal species. Another is the partnership between the Biological Sciences Directorate of the National Science Foundation and the U.S. Geological Survey's Biological Resources Discipline to jointly fund selected projects to increase access to biological systematics and collections information.

Biodiversity and ecosystem informatics is an activity in which the non-Federal sectors (State and local government, tribal organizations, non-governmental organizations, and the international community) play a very significant role as information providers and users. BioEco, as the Federal-level focal point for this activity, thus also provides a common foundation from which Federal agencies can better coordinate their outreach and initiatives with non-Federal partners. Conversely, BioEco provides a recognized focal point for non-Federal entities and organizations to communicate and coordinate with Federal agencies that are involved in biodiversity and ecosystem informatics. Finally, because biodiversity and ecosystems research and understanding are global in nature, there is a need to have a federal focal point for discussion and coordination of information regarding international programs and activities in biodiversity informatics.

The CENR SES, therefore, continues the Work Group on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Informatics as a focus through which to improve coordination of Federal biodiversity and ecosystem informatics activities, and to coordinate or meld its products with those of the non-Federal sector, as well as with international efforts.

C. Functions

The functions of the BioEco WG are to:

1. Provide a recognized, high-level focal point for increasing communication, coordination, and leveraging of Federal activities in the area of biodiversity and ecosystem informatics, working with other key entities including the CENR U.S. Group on Earth Observations (US GEO).

2. Provide a focal point from which the Federal agencies working in this area can more effectively initiate and engage in partnerships with the non-Federal sector, and provide a focal point for non-Federal agencies and organizations to coordinate with the Federal agencies.

3. Provide a focal point to represent Federal agency programs, activities, and priorities in biodiversity and ecosystem informatics to the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology.

4. Provide a focal point for more effectively coordinating U.S. biodiversity and ecosystem informatics activities with international efforts and organizations in this area.

5. Advise the SES and make recommendations on initiatives and issues relating to biodiversity and ecosystem informatics.

6. Activities to be carried out by the BioEco Work group are given in Appendix A.

D. Membership

Membership in BioEco shall be solicited to include representatives from the following agencies that have Biodiversity and Ecosystems responsibilities, and is open to other Federal agencies with interest in its activities:

Council on Environmental Quality

Department of Agriculture
- NAL
- Forest Service
- NRCS

Department of Commerce
- NOAA

Department of Defense

Department of Energy

Department of Homeland Security

Department of Interior Agencies
- USGS
- FWS
- National Park Service

Department of State

Department of Transportation

Environmental Protection Agency

Health and Human Services
- CDC
- NIH
- NLM/NCBI

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

National Archives and Records Administration

National Science Foundation

Smithsonian Institution

US AID

All organizations are encouraged to name a principal member and an alternate. Meetings are open to Federal employees with responsibilities in biodiversity and ecosystems informatics. On occasion, meetings may be limited to principal members or their designees due to the specific nature of the material under discussion or due to time constraints.

E. BioEco Operations

1. There will be two co-chairs, each from a different agency, and an Executive Secretary. An OSTP liaison for the group will be identified, along with an opportunity provided for OMB representation.

2. BioEco may establish subgroups to work on particular tasks, including meetings, reports, deliverables, and proposals as well as outcomes from meetings and workshops.

3. The BioEco group will convene regular meetings and member agencies will be asked to host the meetings. BioEco will share and discuss perspectives of all participating agencies and ensure coordination among the parties.

4. Agendas and records of actions of BioEco meetings are prepared by the Executive Secretary. Complete records of all activities are maintained by the Executive Secretary.

F. Private Sector Interface

BioEco may work with the President's Committee of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) to secure appropriate private sector advice, and will recommend to the SES and/or the Director of OSTP the nature of additional private sector advice needed to accomplish its mission. BioEco may also interact with and receive ad hoc advice from various private-sector groups as consistent with the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). BioEco will regularly receive information briefings from non-Federal sources, but these shall be for information only in accordance with FACA.

G. Termination Date

The BioEco Informatics group will terminate on ~~July~~ September 30, 2011, unless renewed by the CENR Subcommittee on Ecosystems.

H. Determination

We hereby determine that the BioEco Informatics Work group is in the public interest in connection with the performance of the duties imposed on the Executive Branch by law, and that such duties can best be performed through the advice and counsel of such a group.

Approved:

Ann Bartuska, U.S. Forest Service — Date: 5/2/08
Co-Chair, NSTC/CENR Subcommittee on Ecological Systems

Susan Haseltine, U.S. Geological Survey — Date: 5/5/08
Co-Chair, NSTC/CENR Subcommittee on Ecological Systems

APPENDIX A
Activities of the Biodiversity and Ecosystems Work Group

1. Maintain a framework for a national biological information infrastructure that addresses common needs and interests and defines the mission, goals, priorities and strategy for implementation. This framework will continue to be updated and expanded as necessary.

2. Identify opportunities for interagency and inter-sector cooperation and coordination in undertaking activities pursuant to the framework document. This includes identifying current interagency programs and activities that are relevant to the mission and those which should be continued or expanded. Examples of activities or topics on which BioEco could initially focus would include, but not be limited to, the continued development of the Integrated Taxonomic Information System, development of components of a distributed, "virtual national natural history museum," and establishment of a collaborative activity on biodiversity and ecosystem dynamics informatics that would, for instance, integrate species-level information with ecological and ecosystem information.

3. Provide a focal point from which the Federal agencies working in this area can initiate and engage in partnerships with the non-Federal sector, and provide a focal point for non-Federal agencies and organizations to coordinate with Federal agencies.

4. Provide a focal point for coordinating U.S. biodiversity and ecosystem informatics activities with international efforts and organizations in this and related areas (such as the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), the Consortium for the Barcode of Life (CBOL), and the Encyclopedia of Life (EoL)), to ensure compatibility of standards and approaches, facilitate sharing of technologies, and provide for equity/reciprocity in data access and exchange.