



Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography

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The Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography (ASLO) has reviewed the report, “Dynamic Earth: GEO Priorities and Frontiers 2015-2020.” We appreciate the opportunity to provide comment on this important document. Below we focus on two of the goals in the document that we feel will be of most interest to our membership

The GEO plan to establish a collaborative effort to understand the water cycle is consistent with ASLO’s mission of creating, integrating and communicating knowledge across the full spectrum of aquatic sciences. ASLO is especially supportive of programs that will improve synthesis and integration within the aquatic sciences. Unfortunately, the current division of aquatic research at NSF – oceanography in GEO and most limnology in BIO – is counterproductive to achieving a holistic understanding of aquatic systems. Over the past two decades, our Board members have frequently discussed the change in the ‘limnology’ component of our U.S. membership, many of whom now refer to themselves as “aquatic ecologists” rather than “limnologists”. As the bulk of their funding comes from BIO, the adoption of a new job title makes sense. We are concerned, however, that over time we may be transitioning the entire field from the more interdisciplinary nature of limnology to a more focused ecological study, to the detriment of the deep understanding we need of all dimensions of aquatic systems. The proposed GEO investment in “basic water cycle research to foster a better understanding of water as a primary agent for transporting mass and energy throughout the Earth” will help by funding research that integrates key components of limnology back into the geosciences, rather than focusing solely on the biological component of freshwater.

ASLO is also supportive of the plan’s goal of encouraging geoscience professionals to communicate clearly with public audiences about the excitement and relevance of their work and to engage in community-based science activities. Scientists are increasingly called upon to inform policy-makers and society; in order for the public to gain the maximum benefit from science, the scientific community needs to find new ways to communicate their knowledge. ASLO has enhanced public communication by scientists for many years through workshops, events, contributed sessions at ASLO conferences, and articles on the topic. GEO has supported several of these initiatives. As scientists and university administrators often take their cue from the Foundation, having GEO explicitly state this goal will result in more scientists heeding the call to communicate to the public.

We feel many of our members will be enthusiastic about the plan, including other components not addressed in this letter. We would look forward to researchers engaged in these initiatives presenting the results of their research at special sessions at ASLO meetings, engaging the broader membership through workshops or town hall meetings, or publishing their results in ASLO journals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Elser', is written over a light gray rectangular background. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Jim Elser, ASLO President