

## **OPENING STATEMENT**

Ranking Member Don Beyer (D-VA)  
Subcommittee on Oversight  
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

*NEON Warning Signs: Examining the Management of the National Ecological Observatory  
Network*  
Joint Subcommittee Hearing

September 19, 2015

Thank you Chair Comstock and Loudermilk.

I believe the National Ecological Observatory Network or NEON is a valuable and innovative scientific project. Its mission, to create a nationwide observatory to detect, study and forecast ecological change, is a major challenge with the potential for great scientific benefits.

I am, however, concerned that some of the management and budget challenges NEON has recently confronted may have been avoided. It appears that the National Science Foundation (NSF) may not have been adequately informed by NEON project management of cost and schedule challenges when they originally emerged. The potential cost overrun also raises legitimate questions about NSF's oversight of the NEON project. It troubles me that NEON was on a projected path that would have placed it \$80 million over budget and potentially 18 months behind schedule, although I am thankful that NSF and NEON Inc. are now taking aggressive actions to put NEON on a better path forward.

I hope that our two witnesses, Dr. Olds from NSF and Dr. Collins from the NEON Inc. governing board, can help us better understand what led to this situation and what corrective actions they have put in place to prevent these issues from emerging in the future. I have other questions regarding how NEON Inc. and NSF are communicating with the ecological sciences community about their needs and what steps they are each taking to ensure that these needs are being appropriately examined and addressed.

We cannot step back to prevent past mistakes or missteps. But we can and should learn from these past events. We can implement corrective actions now to ensure greater oversight of NEON by NSF in the future. NEON is a unique and important scientific endeavor. I believe NEON Inc. and NSF can rise to the challenge and build a cutting edge scientific facility. There may be bumps on the road ahead and new scientific and management challenges. That is not uncommon to innovative technological projects. But I believe the benefits we will draw from NEON's future are indispensable and worthy of our continued investment and support.

I believe it is both wise and important to understand the interaction among organisms in our environment and the impact the environment has on these organisms, specifically how land use changes and climate change are driving ecological change, and how these changing systems in

turn affect human health and wellbeing, and the economy. Fundamentally, this is NEON's purpose. Everyone benefits from this challenging scientific endeavor.

The environmental data NEON will help collect and the scientific analyses that will be conducted will help us all better understand the spread of infectious diseases and invasive species. It will help us gain potential insights into the biological and agricultural impact of increasing droughts across our country. It will help us explore responsible measures regarding land use, and aid scientists in deciphering the challenges we face from a changing climate.

I believe these are deeply important issues, regardless of political convictions. I believe there are legitimate management concerns about NEON that needs to be aggressively addressed and quickly corrected. But I hope those issues are not used as a political excuse to undermine the unique scientific benefits we can all gain from this project.

Thank you. I yield back.