

NSCN SSG conference call minutes

13 October 2010, 1200-1330 EDT

Prepared by Luke Nave

Participants

Rich Birdsey	Johannes Lehmann				
Ron Follett	Luke Nave				
Jen Harden	Rich Pouyat				
Julie Jastrowe	Chris Swanston				
Mark Johnson	Margaret Torn				
Randy Kolka	Eric Vance				

Welcome and Introduction

Chris Swanston opened the meeting with acknowledgement of limited Network activity in the last year; introduced Luke Nave as new Network Coordinator who has helped increase the activity level in recent months.

Terms and turnover of SSG members

Chris Swanston noted that the current SSG members will reach the end of their 3-yr terms this winter (March); requested that current SSG members agree to stay on if at all possible. He also mentioned the need for nominations and elections to add new/replace outgoing SSG members.

Rich Pouyat suggested sharing his role as a representative of the USDA-Forest Service Washington office with Deb Hayes, national program leader in watershed and soil research.

Mark Johnson agreed to remain on the SSG as the representative of EPA's interest in soil C.

Johannes Lehmann agreed to remain on the SSG, citing the present as a poor time to leave in light of limited accomplishments to date.

Eric Vance agreed to remain on the SSG, provided his perspective remains relevant to the Network's trajectory, tasks, and user community.

Chris Swanston stated that the trajectory and user community of the NSCN are to a degree defined by the members of the SSG, and added that Eric's perspective is particularly valuable for that reason.

Randy Kolka agreed to remain on the SSG.

Jen Harden agreed to remain on the SSG for another 1-2 years, citing constant database progress as a major reason to continue her involvement.

Rich Birdsey agreed to remain on the SSG since it is just starting to get moving.

Margaret Torn agreed to remain on the SSG.

Julie Jastrowe agreed to remain on the SSG, since it hasn't done much yet.

Chris Swanston noted the Network's slow progress and need for continued guidance as justification for staying on as Chair of the SSG, unless anyone thinks he should step down.

Johannes Lehmann and **Julie Jastrowe** recommended that Chris remain Chair.

Chris Swanston proposed two nominees to be added to the SSG: Marc Kramer, who is a co-PI on a USDA AFRI grant supporting NSCN database development, data synthesis, and community organization, and Steve Ogle, who has leadership experience in the NACP and expertise in soil C on agricultural lands.

Margaret Torn asked what is the target size of the SSG?

Chris Swanston replied that 15-20 is optimal, being slightly over 20 is okay, but too many more causes loss of cohesiveness. He stressed the importance of the SSG covering a breadth of expertise and agency representation.

Margaret Torn asked how to nominate candidates for the SSG?

Chris Swanston replied that nominees ask to join the SSG (or are asked to join), then provide a CV that includes an interest statement and list of their contributions to the SSG. He asked the group whether this can be done over email?

Rich Birdsey suggested that SSG nominations be discussed at annual, face-to-face SSG meetings.

Chris Swanston agreed that annual face-to-face SSG meetings are a good idea, and it might be logical to schedule them around professional conferences (e.g., AGU).

Rich Birdsey said he has served on another advisory board in which members found face-to-face meetings to be the best way to discuss personnel-type topics, but noted that pre-meeting preparation and post-meeting followup could be accomplished via email.

Johannes Lehmann agreed that annual face-to-face meetings for the SSG are a good idea.

Eric Vance stated that annual face-to-face SSG meetings should be need-based and not the default.

Margaret Torn stated that the entire SSG should try for biannual face-to-face meetings. For the in-between years, all available SSG members could try to meet at a professional conference.

Margaret Torn recommended Umakant Mishra as a new SSG member. Umakant is a postdoc with experience in large-scale soil C stock assessments and geostatistics.

Rich Birdsey suggested that the SSG Chair should have the final word in new additions to the SSG, but should base decisions on input from the entire SSG.

Jen Harden agreed with Rich.

Julie Jastrowe asked how to accommodate highly ambitious members within the NSCN—with positions on the SSG, or in the general membership?

Chris Swanston replied that NSCN members with great ambition and an interest in leadership should apply those attributes towards formation/leadership of subcommittees rather than requesting membership on the SSG, which requires additional attributes (renowned expertise, representation of agency interests).

Eric Vance recommended that SSG members should serve as points of contact for subcommittees that are aligned with their areas of expertise.

Chris Swanston recommended getting Umakant involved in the NSCN, but not via a seat on the SSG.

Jen Harden agreed with Chris and suggested bringing SSG nominees (Kramer and Ogle) up for a vote.

Margaret Torn asked to give the entire SSG a week to consider the merits of these SSG nominees before voting.

Jen Harden stated that it is important to choose SSG nominees based on the expertise/representation gaps they are filling in the SSG rather than by just tossing out names, which perpetuates a good ol' boy system.

Rich Pouyat and **Margaret Torn** agreed.

Chris Swanston requested that SSG members consider Kramer and Ogle in the next week, and then vote whether to incorporate them. Then, in March/April 2011, have a conference call to review more SSG candidates, who may be nominated as: a) additions to the SSG, or b) replacements for SSG members who choose to step down. Thereafter, SSG candidates will be nominated, considered, and voted on once each year.

Criteria for NSCN membership

Eric Vance suggested that offering knowledge of study sites, archives, or datasets are examples of the 'contributed data and information' criterion for membership.

Jen Harden stated that the membership criteria in the Charter are the result of much thought and deliberation, and represent a good consensus that should be left unchanged. She cautioned that being too stringent about requirements for NSCN general membership would discourage people.

Eric Vance agreed and noted that following Jen's advice would allow the NSCN to have broader participation and feedback.

Review of Data Policy

Johannes Lehmann suggested that data contributors set their own (reasonable) timeframes for Phase transitions, and that setting stringent timeframes would only discourage contributions. He recommended encouraging data contributors to submit metadata and placeholders, so that users of the database can see what sort of data are in the pipeline. This would provide a point of contact for said users to get in touch with the contributors and encourage them to provide their full datasets sooner.

Jen Harden agreed that self-guided timelines are preferable.

Julie Jastrowe pointed out that data generators can determine their datasets' timelines by simply waiting to contribute anything. She agreed with Johannes that encouraging contributors to upload their metadata, placeholders and contact information would be a good way to accommodate contributor-defined Phase transitions.

Margaret Torn agreed that metadata and placeholders are a good idea.

Eric Vance felt that making a completely public sampler database will encourage membership and use.

Mark Johnson suggested that screenshots, descriptions of the database contents and functionality might be enough to give nonmembers a taste of the database.

Eric Vance agreed with Mark.

Ron Follett suggested that many people (himself included) have data that is already published/public and could be used in a sampler database.

Jen Harden stated that the sampler database should provide real access and an opportunity to interact with the database, not just screen shots and descriptions. She noted this is particularly true for funding agencies to observe progress.

Margaret Torn was ambivalent about whether the sampler database should be accomplished with real data access or just a descriptive overview.

Randy Kolka said that real data and an interface are preferable to screen shots, and would provide some utility and learning opportunities to entities that might want to use basic data without being NSCN members (e.g., soil science classes).

Ron Follett recommended a minimum of rules pertaining to data contribution and access to encourage the most participation.

Open feedback

Julie Jastrowe referred to the Minimum Criteria for Database Entry and suggested that the preferred form of response data contribution should be %C and BD, not C mass density. It is of course possible to calculate C mass density from the first two, but the first two are interesting response statistics in their own right and should be preferred because they describe the data in their least processed form.

Margaret Torn referred as well to the Minimum Criteria and noted that it was written by 'pit-diggers' and not 'core-takers'. She asked whether the database would accommodate different methods of sampling (e.g., multiple cores vs. one pit per site or plot).

Jen Harden replied that the database gives a unique ID for each observation within it and can accommodate any sort of sampling technique.