

STEAC MEETING REPORT

(01/15/2025)

The members of the STEAC met on January 15, 2025, with a quorum of nine members attending (Meghan Avolio, Henry Bart Jr, Jennifer Edmonds, Shannon LaDeau, Sydne Record, Samapriya Roy, Daniel Rubenstein, Shawn Serbin, and Adrienne Sponberg). Four NEON-Battelle staff attended (Zoe Gentes, Darcy Gora, Paula Mabee, and Tanya Maslak).

The meeting was virtual, and the following topics were discussed: I. Call to order, II. NEON Newsletter updates and request for feedback, III. NEON planned activities with ESA 2025, IV. 2025 STEAC spring in person agenda planning, and V. NEON conference attendance plan 2025.

I. Approval of previous minutes for 12/18/2024: Minutes from prior meeting were approved by STEAC by voice vote.

II. NEON Newsletter updates.

Zoe Gentes presented and led a discussion centered around a comparison of old (September 2023) and new (September 2024) formats based on STEAC recommendations to improve the newsletter format. In late 2022, the newsletter moved away from Constant Contact to a new platform, Sales Force. There was a refresh of the design to make it more visually appealing by having fewer large text blocks, adding photos (especially those with a human element), and condensing content.

In terms of overall engagement statistics, NEON is seeing industry average metrics, or even slightly higher, with a total list size of ~5,400 people. Compared to 2023, 2024 statistics were approximately the same. In 2024, the read through rate was down to 54%, perhaps due to specific content or maybe because the content was more condensed. Content receiving clicks was similar in both years. Top clicks were for links in the Director's message, job portal links, blogs featured at the top of the newsletter, special calls, and big announcements (e.g., Battelle securing the next 5-year contract for NEON operations). However, the click to open ratio went down when comparing the two years. It was noted that past links in the newsletter were not directing to the archived content. NEON staff will fix this issue. The STEAC also suggested that NEON should capture metrics on people using newsletters archived on website, in case people are using direct website access instead of email links.

Future work on the newsletter will include: adding a Table of Contents at the top to enable easier navigation of the newsletter, adding more important links to Paula's message since those are targeted, and modifying the subject line. It was also noted by NEON staff that tracking community engagement with statistics/metrics on the newsletter is tricky, but it would be helpful to be able to look at this over time. The STEAC also suggested NEON consider the following changes to the newsletter: adding structure to the Director's message, funding proposal announcements that emphasize the use of NEON data, highlighting underutilized NEON data or resources to promote

awareness about them, and continuing to consider the wording of subheadings to make them more “catchy.”

III. NEON planned ESA 2025 activities.

NEON has proposed several activities for the annual Ecological Society of America (ESA) Meeting in August. Note that these activities at this point are just proposed, but have not yet been accepted by ESA. These activities include: a field trip to the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center (SERC) NEON site including an eddy flux tower trip, workshops and short-courses (e.g., near-term forecasting of ground beetles in collaboration with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), remote sensing with the Airborne Observation Platform (AOP), and use of the Biorepository specimens); the NEON Exhibit Booth; a special session to understand skills and training gaps built on a needs assessment; a career central and recruiting panel, and presentation by NEON Director Paula Mabee who will be panelist for a 75th anniversary session.

The STEAC had several recommendations for NEON to consider regarding engagement at the ESA meeting. One suggestion was to have some kind of experience where people can find data, give feedback on data needs, and ways to explore National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) data with a possible emphasis on Python in addition to R. Another suggestion was to highlight researchers who have used NEON data to further their own career as a means of showing NEON’s positive impact. It was also suggested to see if the NASA wall of screens could highlight researchers using NEON data that are funded by NASA. At the Exhibit Booth, there could be a “What can NEON do for me?” presentation, almost like a doctor’s appointment. NASA Lifelines does something similar to this called “scientist speed dating,” which links people and organizations. There was also a suggestion to have a challenge to “stump the NEON staff” at the Exhibit Booth with a potential title of the “NEON GENIUS BAR.”

NEON ended this discussion by announcing that there will be a new award for the best NEON presentation with up to three awards. The judges will be NEON staff members. The awards will be announced after ESA has ended through NEON communication channels, so that there is time to highlight the researchers in a blog. The STEAC urged NEON to consider how this award opportunity could be routed through official ESA meeting outlets. The STEAC also suggested that NEON have career stage as a category for the awards, so that comparisons would be of people at similar career levels.

IV. 2025 STEAC Spring meeting.

This topic was tabled until the next meeting as time ran out.

V. NEON Conference Attendance Plan.

This topic was tabled for a future meeting as time ran out.