

Toolik Field Station Steering Committee Meeting 2022



January 28, 2022

Attendance

Donie Bret-Harte (co-Chair, IAB), Steve Oberbauer (co-Chair), Breck Bowden (SC member), Brett Biebuyck (SC member), Mike Weintraub (SC member), Michelle Mack (SC member), Ed Rastetter (SC member), Kevin Griffin (SC member), Chris Baird (SC member), Jeffrey Perala-Dewy (SC member, graduate student representative), Jason Dobkowski (SC member, research associate representative), Brian Barnes (SC member, IAB), Marin Kuizenga (TFS staff), Amanda Young (TFS staff), Faustine Bernadac (TFS staff), Chad Diesinger (TFS staff), Joe Franich (TFS staff), Haley Dunleavy (TFS staff), Scott Filippone (TFS staff), Stevie Goetz (TFS staff), Pete Reynoldson (TFS staff), Colin Edgar (TFS staff), Randy Fulweber (TFS staff), Faye Ethridge (TFS staff), Chris Brown (B-ARO), Rachel Murray (B-ARO), David Prusak (B-ARO), Frank Rack (NSF), Bill Hedman (BLM), Sheri Wilson (BLM, Realty Specialist)

TFS Summaries

Notes by Stevie Goetz, summarized by Haley Dunleavy, Marin Kuizenga, Donie Bret-Harte

All members of the Toolik Steering Committee attended this virtual meeting, which featured presentations and discussion on this year's future activities. The presentations are available on the Toolik Field Station website and will not be summarized here. In the following notes, we highlight the major items of discussion.

Operations and COVID-19 Response

Faustine Bernadac and Scott Filippone presented an overview of upcoming 2022 operations. To TFS knowledge, there were no cases of COVID in camp last year. Elsewhere in Alaska, for 2022, the NSF is putting the responsibility of COVID mitigation on the institutions. Research teams will lead field campaigns consistent with institutional, state and tribal guidelines. Toolik Field Station is an exception, and will continue to receive guidance and support from NSF for COVID mitigation because of its shared lab and living facilities. Currently a vaccination/booster requirement and 8-day quarantine policy is in place, but TFS will continue to review its policies as the pandemic shifts. Dropoff in Prudhoe Bay will be permitted if arranged in advance, but not pickups. There are no plans for regular testing in camp, but pre-trip testing in quarantine will continue with the help of B-ARO.

Remote Access Discussion

Amanda Young presented on SEDC activities and upcoming plans for remote access in 2022. There was discussion about phasing out the EDC Unispec since it isn't in production anymore and replacing it with a more commonly used up-to-date model. The Arctic LTER expressed that they would be interested in its replacement.

There was widespread support expressed for remote access and its continuation into a post-pandemic future, especially as a mechanism for extending data collection into the shoulder seasons. TFS will take care to ensure that remote access 1) doesn't prevent students and early career researchers from accessing transformative field experiences, 2) is equitable in the distribution of base support available for each project and that projects are charged for hours spent over the base support, and 3) ensure training so protocols are performed with accuracy and consistency.

Graduate Student and Post-doc Perspective

Jeff Perala-Dewey presented results from the graduate student and post-doc survey. Faustine said that she hopes the upgrades to the Community Center provided a more comfortable space for users. Steering Committee members supported the purchase of a Wiley Mill/tissue grinder and freeze dryer, but not the purchase of a CN analyzer due to the training and time required for its upkeep. Generally, the Committee was supportive of expanding the TUNDRA award to include travel costs, but acknowledged its limited funding. Brian Barnes made note that Steering Committee members interested in expanding the TUNDRA award should donate to the TFS Early Career Research Support fund.

Research Assistant Perspective

Jason Dobkowski presented results from the RA survey. There was post-presentation discussion about missing equipment, the need to replace tools in the community workshop, the difficulty of shipping samples with a limited truck schedule, and the need for improvements to the camp's internet coverage.

Breck Bowden asked for clarification about a reported concern that staff were not following the same quarantine protocols as other residents. Donie specified that staff follow identical protocol to users and that they remain in quarantine if they help on "turn and burn" trips to transport trucks. There were some contractors who were unable to quarantine, and they were handled according to the TFS COVID mitigation plan. One miscommunication that happened last summer surrounded an emergency transport to Prudhoe Bay. The protocol for emergency trips such as this one is in the mitigation plan. The concern of unfair, secret treatment resulted from the effort to protect patient privacy. Future transports for medical emergencies will likely be handled as medevacs rather than driving to Prudhoe or Fairbanks. TFS will better communicate with camp residents to reassure them that their health and safety remain a priority.

Faustine thanked Jason for his community building efforts and service as one of the Science Community Liaisons. This year, TFS appointed a second Science Community Liaison. Both liaisons met weekly with the Camp Managers. Haley Dunleavy asked for clarification as to whether liaisons are required to report instances of sexual misconduct. To Jason's knowledge, this was not a previous requirement for liaisons. There was uncertainty about whether science community liaisons should be required to report sexual misconduct to TFS. Ed Rastetter said there may be reporting hesitancy if there aren't confidential resources available, but also said that most institutions he has been a part of have leaned towards the side of everyone being a mandatory reporter to catch chronic offenders. Brett Biebuyck added that confidential resource advocates undergo extensive training. Mandatory reporting ensures that people who disclose misconduct get the resources and support they might need from trained resource counselors. It would be

really hard to get the rotating liaisons trained to a level where they could provide the proper amount of support and guidance to work through that decision. TFS will require liaisons to report sexual misconduct to TFS staff and management, who would then be required to report it to the UAF Title IX Office.

Diversity and Inclusion at TFS

Haley presented on ongoing diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. There was discussion about the revelation that reports of sexual misconduct had been mishandled for decades at Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI), a similarly isolated field station. Steve appreciated the TFS email response to our community. Breck noted that TFS is known for its comprehensive Title IX policy and often used as an example policy for other field stations to adopt. Michelle Mack reflected on her internal struggles in responding to the STRI news as an advisor who has had students at both field stations (STRI and TFS), but also emphasized that TFS has made great strides in the last 10 years and we should continue to focus on that progress. Brett said his big takeaway from the STRI was that limiting room for abuses of power structure (i.e. gatekeeping) was very important to avoid these situations. TFS does not have the same structure of staff scientists determining which projects get funded and supported to come to TFS as STRI has for its facilities.

The committee also discussed changing the sauna policy to be safer and more welcoming, especially for the LGBTQ+ community. Beginning this summer, there will be no alcohol allowed in or around the sauna. TFS is adding language that specifies gender expansive or non-conforming folks should use whichever sauna hours they feel most comfortable attending and exploring adjusting hours to include a LGBTQ+ only hour.

Lastly, the committee discussed changes to the TFS Code of Conduct and training slides and how to communicate TFS responses to code violations to the community. Breck wrote in support of sending a generic message that "we heard and are acting" to reassure the community that the policies are working. Brett said the previous training slides worked well because of their focus and succinctness. He expressed that the revised training should adhere to those same qualities, remaining digestible and structured to be a quick reference.

Virtual All Scientists Meeting

Amanda and Haley solicited feedback for how to structure an All Scientists Meeting if TFS were to host one this year. Committee members agreed that it shouldn't be held over the summer. Steve supported the idea of having one this spring and not waiting for next year. The new CA budgets for in-person meetings in the future.

Partner Summaries

LTER Update

Ed Rastetter and Kevin Griffin were present as Arctic LTER representatives. Kevin has officially assumed the role of lead PI after Ed stepped down this winter. The remaining transfer of the LTER from the MBL to

Columbia University is underway and nearly complete. Kevin and others are preparing the new proposal (due in Spring). The new theme has been set. Contact Kevin for the slides detailing the new grant objectives if interested.

NEON Update

Chris Baird provided an overview of the upcoming plans for NEON. Every five years, all NEON sites conduct additional protocols to measure productivity, including belowground biomass and herbaceous clipping. This will happen at TFS this year, adding extra staff to their field crew. Also planned is a power upgrade to Oks Creek, including the installation of solar panels near the creek and a propane generator. A smaller satellite dish was installed at the tower to curb the previous problems with snow drifts. Remote sensing flights will also occur this year, with a team stationed out of Deadhorse from around July 16 to August 22.

Chris noted that many of these plans are contingent upon quarantine requirements. He also extended a thank you to the EDC and TFS maintenance crews for year-round support.

INTERACT Update

Donie provided an update on INTERACT and the groups that will be coming to TFS in summer 2022. INTERACT is currently in its third round of grants from the EU. Last year, all projects opted for remote access rather than travel to TFS. It is unknown whether any EU researchers will be able to travel this year, but there is a lot of interest so far from projects requesting access at TFS.

BLM Update

Bill Hedman and Sheri Wilson provided an update on the BLM. Currently, the BLM is understaffed and in the process of hiring for many positions. Notably, the previous point of contact for coordinating the artist-in-residence program retired. Bill is unable to answer TFS questions about the program until they hire the new Coldfoot Visitor Center Manager.

Bill said there was not much to report in terms of big projects happening in the Toolik area other than the Ambler Road project. He provided a brief summary: Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA) has a right-of-way to build the proposed road, which would leave the Dalton Highway around Chapman Lake and go to the Ambler Mining District. They began field studies and cultural work last year and plan to conduct geotechnical work this spring. However, the project is on hold while facing litigation from several ends. If the road is built, it will likely be completed years into the future.

The Central Yukon Resource Management Plan is in process and near completion but has been put on hold. Brian asked if there were any plans for expanding the Toolik RNA. Bill will have to get back to us. The previous federal administration was conservative about expanding RNAs. Donie asked if there will be more opportunities for input with the large turnovers occurring. Bill wasn't completely sure, but expects there will be some opportunities for comment and input.

The Arctic Circle campground is having a grand opening celebration around June 23-25. There will likely be statewide VIPs staying around Coldfoot at that time.

Sheri Wilson, the BLM realty specialist, encouraged everyone to get their permit applications submitted ASAP. Similar to elsewhere at the BLM, the permitting department is short-staffed. Importantly, the previous option to pay for faster processing is no longer available because it was so popular that it didn't ease processing time. Currently, there are two or three older applications for right-of-way in addition to a handful of other applications, including some that will be deemed casual use.

Battelle ARO Update

David Prusak from BARO/Stantec reviewed construction and improvement plans for 2022. The Washateria has been awarded to a builder and is expected to be delivered in camp on June 7. Construction will be completed mid-September with expected occupancy in 2023.

Steve asked about driveway and pad maintenance. The DOT is responsible for the stretch of road from the highway to camp. TFS does their best to repair potholes, but there is sometimes a lack of proper fill material.

Donie and Brian emphasized the increasingly urgent need for new TFS trucks and are happy to see that Battelle is on schedule. David expects the truck procurement to begin in February after the budget is finalized on February 1. Frank Rack mentioned they're actively discussing how supply chain issues might affect the expected date of delivery on new trucks.

The new medical clinic was granted temporary occupancy approval on January 28 and the final occupancy is expected shortly.

Miscellaneous Discussion Items

Steve Oberbauer would like to see TFS follow the path of other field stations in "going green." He suggested fundraising to support the purchase and installation of bifacial solar panels and offered to make a startup donation. Jason echoed Steve's support and indicated many others at TFS would be supportive as well. TFS is supportive of efforts to reduce carbon emissions, but acknowledges that this project would require extensive planning. Frank suggested looking into establishing partnerships with the DOE Arctic Energy Office or NREL's Cold Climate Housing Research Center.

The Steering Committee will meet for a half day discussion-based meeting in the summer. Expect a Doodle poll to coordinate dates.

The meeting adjourned.