

Dear NEESPIans,

The founder of the Northern Eurasia Earth Science Partnership Initiative (NEESPI), Dr. Don Deering, passed away on February 15, 2010. Following is a short personal retrospective of Don's role in establishing and promoting the NEESPI program. It should be of interest to NEESPIans who knew Don personally, as well as to those who only knew him by name or not at all.

In the summer of 1999, Don and I were sitting next to each other on the plane returning from a meeting in Krasnoyarsk, Russia. By that time I had accepted my current position at NASA Headquarters as LCLUC Program Manager but had not yet started my job there. We agreed that it would be nice if there were a program in Siberia similar to LBA in Amazonia and that the ongoing NASA projects in Siberia could form a base for such a program. Several projects were being run independently in Siberia and the idea of putting them into a common framework, leveraging funds, exchanging data and information, planning measurements, etc., seemed rather appealing. I felt that with my Russian background and Don's managerial experience with LBA and his ongoing projects in Siberia we could make this happen. We agreed to promote the idea at some future meeting. In 2000, a workshop on boreal forests was held in Novosibirsk, Russia and a potential new program was discussed. In 2001, there was a meeting in St. Petersburg, where the idea was further promoted to representatives of other agencies. It was Don who coined the acronym NEESPI (with a small edit by World Bank's Andrey Kushlin who suggested that the "P" for "Planning" would rather indicate the word "Partnership"). And it was also Don who developed the NEESPI logo with some input from me. Soon afterwards, a decision was made that the Northern Eurasia program should encompass more than just Siberia or Russia. We delineated the NEESPI geographic domain as the Former Soviet Union (including Central Asia and the Baltics), Mongolia, northern China, Scandinavia and Eastern Europe, which, at that time, was not part of the European Union.

It was not as easy as it might seem to start a program like NEESPI. Ten years ago, the financial situation of Russian academia was in distress. Dealing with our main partners (mostly at the Russian Academy of Sciences), developing a common strategy and thinking about its implementation were a real challenge. Involving all the new countries that appeared after the break-up of the Soviet Union, European countries, Mongolia and China sometimes seemed prohibitive. Dr. Pasha Groisman of NOAA/UCAR, who joined us as the NEESPI Project Scientist, and Don, as the Project Manager, were instrumental making NEESPI grow from a NASA-Russian Academy of Sciences set of projects focused on forests into a large international, multi-institutional program with a broad scientific scope, supported by multiple agencies.

The spring of 2002 preliminary development of a NEESPI Science Plan in Suzdal, Russia, culminated in the review and approval of the Science Plan by an external scientific panel in Yalta, Ukraine that September. The first NEESPI Science Team meeting was held exactly five years ago in IIASA, near Vienna, Austria. After that meeting, the exponentially increasing number of NEESPI members and the variety of the topics and regions made us rethink the logistics of having big Science Team meetings

preferring, instead, to have smaller regional NEESPI meetings. Since then, we have held meetings on forests in the Far East, on Central Asia drylands, on the Arctic zone, on Siberian forests, on non-boreal Europe.

During the past five years, NEESPI has expanded tremendously. For example, in the past year 130 projects in the United States, Russian Federation, China, European Union, Japan, and Canada have been conducted to address the NEESPI Science Plan objectives. Currently, over 500 scientists from more than 200 institutions in 30 countries are contributing to the program. Focus Research Centers and Data Centers have been established. NEESPI has produced numerous tangible products, such as special issues of peer-reviewed journals based on the NEESPI sessions organized at American Geophysical Union and European Geophysical Union assemblies. Several books based on NEESPI results are being published. Recently, a new NEESPI International Program Office was established in Helsinki.

All of the above would not have been possible if not for Don's perseverance in dealing with NEESPI issues, his optimism and enthusiasm in reaching our goals. Just a little more than three years ago Don was diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), often referred to as "Lou Gehrig's Disease." In May 2007, Don joined us at the NEESPI Summit held in Helsinki. At the time, he was still able to walk, with the use of a cane. Don gave a retrospective presentation of the history of NEESPI's inception including some great pictures highlighting the program's milestones and growing pains during its early development. All was very upbeat and humorous, despite his condition.

Of course, I have known Don since well before his role as the NEESPI Project Manager. I first met him almost 20 years ago when he was involved in the data analysis of the FIFE and KUREX field work while I, in my former life as a scientist, was at NOAA/NESDIS struggling with AVHRR data, identifying its potential and limitations for retrieving land surface properties. The first time Don and I spoke, it was about ground measurements that Don had collected with the PARABOLA instrument. We later met in 1992 on the top floor of the Moscow State University, where a meeting on KUREX results was being held.

I believe that Don's contribution to the NEESPI program should be manifested in some near-future products or activities. I suggest that the next NEESPI session at EGU in Vienna be dedicated to Don's memory. I also think it would be appropriate to dedicate the book on Siberia, which is currently in preparation, to Don Deering, a scientist who was involved in Siberia projects before NEESPI's inception, made efforts in promoting measurements in Siberian forests by US scientists and brought the rough idea of a Northern Eurasia program to fruition.

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