INSTITUTE OF RENEWABLE NATURAL RESOURCES

Group II Session, TAES Conference, Jan. 6, 1977
Room 350, MSC, Texas A&M University
Dr. Robert Merrifield, Coordinator

INTRODUCTION -- Dr. Robert Merrifield

The objectives of this meeting are twofold: (a) to describe the present situation regarding the Institute of Renewable Natural Resources and (b) to obtain response and input from the audience as to how you perceive the institute and how it could best serve you as a faculty.

The institute has been developing over a ten-year period. It began by action of the Coordinating Board in 1965 by creating the School of Natural Biosciences in order to integrate the four departments of Forest Science, Recreation & Parks, Wildlife and Fisheries, Sciences and Range Science into one unit.

Since that time, the School never really has functioned--at least not in an official capacity. Informally, the department heads have collaborated on several issues, especially since 1969. Together, they have accomplished the following: created a basic ecology course, RNR (NBS) 205 and 215; identified several other RNR 444, RP 375 courses; established a Resource conservation option; established a communications resource group at assist each department (housed in Recreation and Parks Building); worked toward an off-campus facility field station (not created but still a viable goal); worked toward a consolidated building (plans now shelved).

About 1970, a proposal was made to change the School of Natural Biosciences into a School of Natural Resources. This was not well received by the administration. However, it did provide a basis for further consideration of the concept.
In 1975, a visiting team from the Society of American Foresters, assessing accreditation of the Department of Forest Science, learned about the School of Natural Biosciences and inquired about its functions. When they learned of its status, they recommended to the President of the University that it be activated. The administration, however, recommended an "Institute" instead on the basis that the term "school" was no longer an acceptable administrative unit at Texas A&M. This is easily accomplished because it does not require approval of the Coordinating Board or Board of Regents. The Institute of Renewable Natural Resources was therefore approved.

Vice President John C. Calhoun, Jr. raised the question of the Institute becoming a college. He cited recommendations of the accrediting team and recognized that the size of the teaching and research programs of the four departments equalled or exceeded several other colleges on the campus. The recommendation was made to the President who rejected the proposal on the basis that the timing was inappropriate--this type of issue should not be raised before the Coordinating Board at that time.

At this time, Dean H. O. Kunkel requested that the four departments plan for the implementation of an institute. After discussion, the department heads recommended the following to the Dean: (1) that a director of the Institute be named as a full-time staff member in the Dean's office (but not as a line officer between department heads and the Dean); (2) that the Institute be governed by an executive committee composed of the four department heads; (3) that the Institute function as a center of teaching and research; and (4) that the purpose be the increased visibility of natural renewable resource subject matter and especially to strengthen relationships with external organizations.

For over one year, little has happened, except that the departments have continued to grow. There are now 1,059 undergrad students, 266 masters, 122 Ph.D.'s (33 percent of total Ph.D.'s) which is 25 percent of the entire
College of Agriculture enrollment. There are 70 faculty members teaching and
doing research, 19 off-campus people and 25 extension specialists. The appropriat-
ed funds are $1.8 million.

For presenting ideas, a faculty member from each of the four departments
has agreed to speak briefly today. These are: Dr. Robert Baker, Forest Science;
Dr. Fred Smeins, Range Science; Dr. Jim Stribling, Recreation and Parks; and
Dr. Keith Arnold, Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences.

Dr. Robert Baker:

I would like to discuss this topic in three categories:

1. Advantages:
   a. Renewable natural resources, as a topic, needs visibility across
      the campus and throughout the state;
   b. Contract applied research would expand. Therefore, we could
      expand graduate programs.
   c. A Director (of an Institute) could know each area well and could
      direct funding into interdisciplinary research and teaching.
   d. We could talk to each other more. This would be true of advis-
      ing, teaching and serving on graduate committees.

2. Requisites:
   a. The Director of the Institute would be a staff member—not a line
      administrator. He would have to be capable of subordinating his
      personal feelings to the needs.
   b. The four department heads must not dominate the Director.
   c. The Director could begin as part-time; then earn his full-time
      status by his actions.
   d. A regular publication would be issued.
e. The RNR courses would be broad enough that they could be taught by qualified faculty of any of the four departments.

3. Problems:
   a. Acceptance may be a problem from all departments.
   b. Acceptance must be obtained from every faculty member.
   c. Success or failure will depend upon how well it is accepted.

Dr. Fred Smeins:

In my opinion, the most positive advantage of the institute is that of visibility and identification. Other advantages, however, seem to be a bit nebulous.

Another question centers on how strong the Director should be. It appears that he must function in between the Dean and the department heads.

I have discussed the Institute with the other members of the Range Science department. Several have asked whether this is a paper organization or is it real. Leaving it as merely a paper organization may be a good solution.

One point that has been made is the mutual development of courses. However, I can see some problems. What new courses? Do we need them? Would we cross-list existing courses? What would the departments give up in order to do it? How would new courses be developed?

Another proposal that has been made is that of a faculty of ecology—a loose grouping for mutual interests and problem solving. Would this be an alternative or not?

Regarding past accomplishments, the four departments have planned for mutual use of the Experimental Range area (teaching, research, extension).

Graduate seminars could be developed. Several departments have similar interests.
There could be economy of costs of outside speakers. The four departments could plan their use together. There might result better audiences and better coordinated programs among the four departments.

Dr. Jim Stribling:

I have polled my associates in the Recreation and Parks department. This resulted in "no consensus." Perhaps it could be paraphrased best as "hopefully skeptical." My recreation and parks colleagues identified both benefits and problems.

I guess we must assume that we have an Institute. If this is true, what should it be? Who benefits? And, who bears the cost? How different would this be than the existing College of Agriculture? Is there need for fragmenting out from the College?

Personally, I can identify some beneficiaries of an Institute: (1) students, both graduate and undergraduate; (2) researchers, especially in coordinated research; (3) instruction, all the way from advising to collaboration; (4) extension education; (5) publics—better contact with the field; (6) the College of Agriculture as well as the overall university. But, we need to ask: will this draw the lines between the resources field and traditional agricultural production field within the College of Agriculture? Will they become competitive for funds?

There are advantages to an Institute. Students could benefit from knowing they are in the field of "Renewable Natural Resources." This could enhance the student's understanding of renewable natural resources and the place of each discipline in the overall field of renewable natural resources. This could provide more than lip service to the field. There could be strengthening of sources of funding. However, there can be no imperatives that would force cooperative work.
Could enhance the visibility of the overall College by enhancing the Institute. But, this would have to be done very carefully. Believe that the whole could be greater than the sum of its parts.

**Dr. Keith Arnold:**

Personally, I am concerned with (1) how will the administrative procedure be effected--there could be benefits by having a Director in the Dean's office; (2) benefits to research--but it could bog down teaching. Would teaching loads increase? Who gets credit for what?

The benefits to the undergrads are less clear to me than to the graduate students.

My greatest interest is in how it can benefit the staff member or will it cause more paperwork? Actually, I guess I am sitting on the fence, but lean toward the Institute. Visibility is important but the past experience of dummy title on letterhead has created confusion.

If we have an institute, we need a strong director to pull forces together.

**DISCUSSION:**

**Question:** Would the Institute move toward a College?

**Merrifield:** I would not speculate on this. It could happen as one result if it proved itself viable.

**Question:** What would be the relationship to TAES?

**Merrifield:** The present relationship could remain, as is now the case with the College of Veterinary Medicine. Would not need to be a change.

**Comment:** This could be a disadvantage, depending upon the Director.

**Question:** Are we de-emphasizing the teaching aspects? Couldn't this be a real strength? Service courses could be expanded. More opportunities in graduate areas: systems ecology, research techniques, could better be
taught as RNR courses for all departments.

Comment: I am confused. We have had a School. We have had the opportunity; now we are only adding a man to the Dean's office. How come? Will he dictate or encourage? If service courses are taught, they may be diluted. How will the Director function? How will he be effective?

Comment: This is the main problem. He must act like an Executive Secretary or a Dean--there is little room between. Could lead to a Dean, but might be better as a staff person or director. Would be a policy-maker or advise the Dean on policy.

Merrifield: I am not visualize another administrative layer between department heads and the Dean. The Director is seen as one in the Dean's office to be close to the Dean on teaching and Experiment Station matters.

Smeins: Would the department heads' role be enhanced by having a Director?

Reid: There are internal advantages to coordinate the four departmental activities in ways that we have not done before. The Director would not be suspect. There is a perceived advantage of having a representative in the Dean's office. Animal science does. Externally, there have been opportunities go by that could have been picked up. We could possibly lose the Experiment Station funding. We should have a Director who is subordinate to the Dean, administratively. A coordinating role is good. At one time, there was an idea of one of the four department heads serving as Director. I object to this; we need one outside Director--one whom I can boss.

Clarke: But, if somebody is named Director, won't he be the boss. Usually, when one carries such a title, he is the boss. Perhaps the title is critical. Maybe he should be an Executive Secretary in order to avoid
this problem.

Merrifield: The time has passed as viewing the directorship as a joint position. Funding is now available for a position of Director. It is in the Dean's budget.

Comment: Would the Director sit on research proposals and teaching roles? I am concerned about this. It seems this would be another hurdle to clear. A Lobbyist role I can take.

Schuster: Perhaps we have the wrong title. Perhaps he should be an Associate Dean of Natural Resources. This would make him an assistant to the Dean--advisory to the Dean and Director Miller and the same in Extension. Also, I am not for a college in the future, personally. Range Science is closely related to production agriculture. I would not want to lose to traditional agriculture for funding.

Comment: Veterinary Medicine now has an Assistant Dean in the College of Agriculture.

Comment: If a Director is not in a direct administrative line, he may not know what's going on in the departments.

Merrifield: Could be shut off by the Dean. On the other hand, if the Dean feels that he is helpful, he could be effective.

Question: What is the timetable? How soon will we move?

Merrifield: We do not know for sure. The position of the Director is there--it has been funded.

Comment: The Dean did ask for the department heads to make recommendation.

Merrifield: We would like to use the outcome of this meeting for further discussions with the Dean.

Bury: Will the department heads take the results, make a proposal, take it to their faculties and then to the Dean?
Merrifield: We have not structured the process.

Bury: The department heads possibly could represent our feelings but they might benefit from overall faculty reaction to a firm proposal. It is now hard for faculty to react without this. Now we do not know what is really proposed. It seems that we are back where we were a year ago. We need more than pros and cons--we need a proposal.

Merrifield: Are you proposing that heads here take what we have discussed and formulate a specific proposal?

Bury: Yes. Take it to the faculty first--then, to the Dean.

Merrifield: It could be done but we cannot make it very specific.

Comment: I want the department heads to think about what we're getting into.

The heads should declare their direction of growth.

Garrison: Some people apparently feel threatened. What will it do to teaching students; what are the relationships to students? I am not competent to comment on either. Would a director give this greater prestige? Have felt it is needed but is there a need? What serves the student best?

Merrifield: The impact on the undergraduates may not be too striking, except for some new course listings. I would put priorities on the graduate teaching and research programs. This is my personal opinion. The undergrad may be helped in his search for finding relevance but may not be impacted greatly. The door is not closed to Extension. Could be incorporated.

Smeins: I believe it must go back to the faculty. Considering all the pros and cons, it seems that everything can be done now, without an Institute. Much depends on how much the faculty want to do it.

Stribling: There appears to be no ground-swell of interest from the faculty to have an Institute. A great deal of coordination and cooperation
has already happened. If the intent is to increase the visibility it
can only be done at a cost to some other things—a new cost to the
departments.

Baker: I do not buy it! It is not necessary to cut into others at all.

Smeins: We have the ability now.

Baker: We're being asked would it be better if we had someone in the pulse.

Arnold: It may be best to have only a man in the Dean's office to help. We
may not need an Institute.

Schuster: This is our intent—to have an assistant to the Dean.

Garrison: Perhaps we need to put all this into the context of Carter's new
administration. Undoubtedly there will be greater emphasis in the natural
resources field? What is the best way to take advantage of this situation?

Question: Would the present RNR courses have been possible without the School
of Biosciences' blessing?

Comment: Yes. It has been done. We can have triple listing without an Institute.

In traditional agriculture, there are concerns about whole plant treat-
ment. What is the loss to discipline roots?

Merrifield: We will put these comments together and invite further comments after
the meeting. Now is the time for action.

Reported by Dr. Clare A. Gunn