Expanding the Integration and Application of Long-Term Ecological Research

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Expanding the Integration and Application of Long-Term Ecological Research

In 1980, the National Science Foundation boldly funded six Long Term Ecological Research (LTER) sites to pursue sustained ecological studies. Although they were far sighted, the founders could not anticipate the critical role that their imaginative program would play in meeting twenty-first century demands posed by rapid environmental change. That message, and others, emerges from the six articles in the special section in this issue. The US LTER Network has become a globally important scientific asset; it provides critical site- to regional-scale science to promote continental understanding, and its scenario science, cross-sites syntheses, and engagement with decisionmakers are valuable resources for meeting environmental grand challenges.

The first three articles highlight the breadth and application of LTER. Robertson and his colleagues melded historical perspective with vision to demonstrate that the LTER Network is uniquely positioned to leverage the capacity of other existing and emerging programs and observatories by adding biome-specific science, mechanistic understanding, experiments, and socioecological insights (p. 342). In their article beginning on page 354, Driscoll and colleagues promote continental understanding, and its scenario science, cross-site syntheses, and engagement with decisionmakers are valuable resources for meeting environmental grand challenges.

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