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The National Center

for Landscape Fire Analysis

Summary of Center Review Report: The National Center for Landscape Fire Analysis (Fire Center) describes itself as a locus for research, learning, and technology development. Currently, faculty and staff in the Fire Center—housed in the College of Forestry and Conservation— teach undergraduate courses in Fire Ecology and Management, Geographic Information Systems, and other important courses across the curriculum. Most notably, approximately 13 students per year enroll in the Prescribed Fire Practicum, an innovative service learning opportunity offered at the Lubrecht Forest. At the time of self-study the Fire Center was also supporting five graduate students—three seeking PhDs and two seeking MS degrees).

Purpose: The Fire Center applies innovative approaches to develop and deliver geospatial information products through training, education, and support for both undergraduate and graduate research. It also examines the social, institutional, and economic considerations that affect the utility of relevant science and information technologies and evaluate systems that can improve the effectiveness of information delivery. It provides rapid, real-time access to data products that assist in managing wildfires, restoration, and fire prevention.

Objectives: The Fire Center self-study and supporting documents demonstrate that it is a stable institution that promotes quality land management and contributes knowledge and applications that support land management planning and implementing and evaluating landscape projects.

Review in terms of the University’s mission.

Comments: The work of the Fire Center aligns with the University of Montana’s Strategic Plan in the areas of Partnering for Student Success, Education for the Global Century, Discovery and Creativity to Serve Montana and the World, and Dynamic Learning Environment.For example,over half of the students who have participated in the Prescribed Fire Practicum are successfully engaged in a career managing wild fire.

Does ECOS/Faculty Senate consider this center controversial? No.

Is the relationship with academic units beneficial? Yes. As stated in the Charter of itsr governing body, the Fire Center “brings together scientific expertise, technological capability, education, and on-the-ground practical experience from the U.S. Forest Service’s Rocky Mountain Research Station, the University of Montana, and the University of Idaho to provide students and faculty on campus with new ideas, tools, and technology to address the complex issues of fire management.”

Is the program revenue neutral or does it consume more resources than it generates? If so, is the use of University resources justified? Base funding for the Fire Center is provided through five-year agreements with the USDA Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Center. The amount of Total Direct Costs exceeding the Base Funding is expected to be covered as part of the Extramural Funding over the next five years.

Is the entity making progress toward objectives? Yes. The Fire Center has long term strategic plans to help its partners in the profession make safe, efficient, and effective decisions in all aspects of fire, through research and on-site intervention and practice. It has clear goals for its fiscal sustainability as well as assessable short term goals and objectives for each fire season.

Recommendation: Continue.

Justification: The Fire Center plays a vital and active role in land management and conservation in Montana and beyond. The 2015 fire season alone includes an impressive list of training, research, and operational accomplishments that demonstrate the importance of the Center to researchers and forest managers. University students benefit from the field training and research opportunities afforded them. The external reviewer states that “through their work [Fire Center staff] actively enable federal and state managers to make timely decisions that often lead to increased firefighter safety and reduction of wildland fire losses.”

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