

Dear NOW Advisory Board Members and other Friends of NOW,

It gives me great pleasure to announce that we have made two major steps indicated in my previous circular:

First, we have put in place a North American Advisory Board for NOW, with Christine Janis as North American Coordinator. It gives me great pleasure to officially welcome our new members, in alphabetical order: Barry Albright, Jon Baskin, Scott Foss, Tony Frisca, Gregg Gunnell, Richard Hulbert, Christine Janis, Bill Korth, Joshua Ludtke, Greg McDonald, Matt Mihlbachler, Tonya Penkrot, Josh Samuels, Bill Sanders, Mary Silcox, Richard Stucky, Jessica Theodor, Blaire Van Valkenburgh, Mike Woodburne, and Shawn Zack. I look forward to developing our increasingly global database together, even though I'm sure we'll have some thorny issues to deal with. I also warmly welcome these additional new Board members: Isaac Casanovas Villar, Lars van den Hoek Ostende, Alexey Tesakov, Pierre-Olivier Antoine, and Giannis Giaourtsakis. The Advisory Board listing on the webpage will be revised to reflect our increasingly complex structure, and will of course show the respective responsibilities of our new members.

The entry of the North American data, from the Tertiary Mammals of North America volumes edited by Janis et al., is underway but it will be a while before the work is finished. It will of course not be part of the public database for some time yet.

Secondly, the New User Interface, which I think I have promised annually for the last five years, is actually ready. We plan to make the switch during Monday, October 26, so the database will be off line for a short time during that day. The new interface is PHP-based and finally gets rid of the annoying need to download a client, hopefully without losing any of the nice functionality of the present one. It has been planned and developed mainly by Gudrun Evans, who also created the one presently in use, and finished by Mr. Jouni Vepsäläinen of Enporia Ltd. Under the new system direct editing of the database should be very straightforward and we encourage members to request their own user accounts for this purpose. We have made a serious effort to test the interface before launching it but it is still very likely that bugs will be discovered. Please report any malfunctions or oddities that you may observe!

NOW continues to grow, and plans are in place to develop NOW sections for Australia as well as for South America. There are also other expansions and additions that will be the subject of a future circular. However I would like here to invite comments on an idea that I have been developing in my mind for some time. It is meant to achieve three things: (a) provide a way to acknowledge continuing contributions to the database and (b) help prevent the growth of the Advisory Board beyond reasonable limits and (c) provide a mechanism for recruitment and continuity.

I'm thinking of establishing a NOW Working Group, to consist of people who actively contribute to the contents of the NOW database by adding or revising data. As for the Advisory Board, members would be listed on the NOW web page. Working Group members would all have direct editorial access to (some part of) the NOW data, and would be added (and removed, though not frivolously) at an ad hoc basis by the Coordinator, in contrast to the Advisory Board, where membership is based on a 5-year period. New Board members would typically be recruited from the Group, but it might also make sense for some Board members to move to the Group, depending on their preferences. I think this might work quite well. Comments?

In my previous circular I mentioned transferring the database to a server in the Finnish Museum of Natural History. Despite good intentions on all sides this did not work out too well this time, and while we wait for the next opportunity we're trying a solution based at the Institute of Biotechnology, where Mr. Arto Tossavainen has provided invaluable expert support during and following the transfer. We're deeply indebted to him and very happy with the present situation!

All the best from a Helsinki rapidly sliding towards winter!

Mikael