



Smithsonian Environmental Research Center

October 29, 2021

TO: David J. Ward, Mark Holey, and Caitlin Oleson

SUBJECT: Letter of Support for Green Bay Ecosystems NERR

I am providing this letter at your request in support of efforts to establish a Green Bay NERR site. I have also been contacted by Matthew Peter with the same request.

I am fully supportive of this request based on my history of collaboration with the NERR site in Kachamak Bay (Alaska) and previous and ongoing collaborations with The Ridges, an organization that would fall within the Green Bay NEER. I have also been engaged with other NEER sites since their, especially the Chesapeake Bay NEER where I have conducted wetland research at two of their sites..

The NEER program provides a wide range of valuable assets to communities where they occur. Those benefits range from research to public outreach and education. They also provide a framework for collaboration with the research community. It is that context that I am especially interested in the proposed Green Bay NEER and the research that I have done with the Kachemak Bay NERR. At the KBNERR, our focus has been on landscape linkages; recognizing that what happens in the estuary is influenced by what happens on the land. We have demonstrated important linkages between landscape attributes of watershed in the Kenai Lowlands and that abundance of juvenile salmonids in headwater streams and, eventually the estuary. In addition, biodiversity is an important aspect of healthy landscapes and plants are an important component of landscape biodiversity. At the KBNERR, we have also worked with the Kachemak Heritage Land Trust to add an orchid element to our research.

More than 50% of the orchids in the U.S. and Canada are threatened in some part of their range of distribution and it is important to understand how they 'fit' into the ecosystem to assure their survival. Understanding the ecology of native orchids is the focus of an organization (North American Orchid Conservation Center) that I started to assure the survival of all native orchid in the U.S. and Canada. We work with more than 60 collaborators and institutions across the U.S. in Canada and the U.S., including collaborators at The Ridges that would be within the Green Bay NEER. Given our past history in working at The Ridges, we would look forward to expanding collaborations to other areas within the Green Bay NEER, with a goal of conserving orchids and also gaining a better understanding landscape linkages and the characteristics of healthy ecosystems.

I fully support the efforts to establish the Green Bay Ecosystems NERR and would look forward to working with collaborators that form the NERR.

647 Contees Wharf Road
Edgewater, MD 21037-0028
443.482.2226 Telephone
443.482.2380 Fax

Please feel free to contact me should you have any additional questions.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dennis P. Whigham". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dennis Whigham, Ph.D.
Senior Botanist
Founding Director, North American Orchid Conservation Center

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