



Presidents Column

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For my last column as president of IBA, I have invited the past 3 IBA presidents (Harry Reynolds, 2001-2007; Frank van Manen, 2008-2013; Karen Noyce, 2014-2016) to join me in conveying to you our shared excitement about IBA's future. The excitement is this: that in implementing a series of incremental structural changes, IBA is taking courageous steps to better pursue its mission, growing its programs in accordance with the clear wishes of you, the members, and the continuing needs of bears.

Where did this start?

For many years, IBA functioned successfully as a small, growing, volunteer-based non-profit professional organization. But in time, its growth — in conferences, quality of the IBN newsletter, grants programs, web presence, student programs, and member services — created increasingly unsustainable workloads for key IBA Council members and other volunteers. Having served in various positions (President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Councilor) for a combined 66 years, we've been a part of and witnessed the workload of IBA's volunteers grow to unsustainable levels. Yet, at the same time, we know IBA members enthusiastically support these programs and their continued growth and improvement. Most notably, this was communicated loudly and clearly in the 2015-member survey, the results of which were presented in the plenary session in Anchorage, 2016.

Council's challenge was clear: how to prevent volunteer burnout and ensure integrity in operations but continue to pursue IBA's mission and enhance IBA's impact in ways desired by members and IBA leadership alike. Shortly after the Anchorage conference, Council received an amazing offer for *pro-bono* assistance from the management consultant company, Oliver Wyman (OW). In the fall of 2017 (at the IBA conference in Quito), with



input from dozens of key IBA and BSG leaders and members, the OW team drafted a blueprint for incremental structural change that could enable IBA to grow its programs for greater impact on multiple fronts. For several months, Council worked on that plan and adjusted it to ensure IBA's unique scientific mission and supportive professional culture was maintained. Last year, prior to the Ljubljana conference, 20+ Council and committee chairs participated in a one-day workshop to refine this plan and start mapping the way forward (what became known as the "transition").

So, what exactly is this "transition"??

From the start, there was overwhelming consensus among Council and other key volunteers that to pursue any growth in programs (and indeed, even to responsibly maintain the status quo), the only reasonable option was to explore hiring one or more key executive staff to relieve Council of operational tasks, assist with strategic outreach and planning, and, critically, to develop sustainable funding for IBA to further deliver on its core goals, as articulated in the Bylaws.

On the IBA website you can view a summary of the final plan that Council formally adopted last winter for these stepwise structural changes to IBA. The plan outlines an organization with a significantly larger annual budget, enabling IBA to have several employees and a much more robust budget for delivering on its core goals. Most support will come from outside sources, as per the current Bear Conservation Fund, so IBA will not be limited by the modest revenues from memberships and publications, nor driven to rely on constantly boosting membership for funding.

The initial staff will include 1) a Director of Transition, hired first to professionally support the evolution of IBA, and 2) an Executive Director, ideally a person with a strong track record in fundraising, non-profit administration, and working in partnership with a Board of Directors. The Executive Director will be directed by, and report to, IBA Council, with chief duties of fundraising, assisting in IBA's development of a long-term strategic plan, overseeing general operations, ensuring quality and compliance, and growing the grants programs. Council will continue to set all direction and policy.

At some point after the Executive Director is in place, the Director of Transition will morph into a Director of Member Services and Capacity Building. This position will be responsible for assuring excellent member services, providing support and consistency for conferences and committees, and for actively exploring ways to serve members, for example through further development of the Experience and Exchange grants and other training opportunities.

The plan envisions that eventually a Director of Grants and Conservation will oversee the administration and strategic expansion of grants programs, working with a broad advisory committee of IBA professionals in bear science, management research, and conservation.



With their guidance, grant programs can be tailored to the best use of funding in different regions of the world and to align with priorities identified in official conservation plans, such as the recent IUCN/BSG Conservation Action Plan for Sun Bears.

Legal reviews of IBA's bylaws by an attorney ensures that all actions by Council thus far are in accordance with IBA's bylaws.

Quo vadis IBA?

As you might know from IBA communications last spring, Council implemented the first step of its "transition" last January, hiring Jennapher Teunissen van Manen as the full-time Director of Transition. As someone intimately knowledgeable of IBA's operations, she was the perfect candidate and hit the ground running. She has assumed responsibility for many tasks that were overwhelming the President and Secretary and she coordinates the myriad of steps necessary for this process. As former and current presidents of IBA, we cannot overstate how transformative this has already been for IBA's leadership. Council can now count on timeliness, thoroughness, and attention to detail in executed tasks. Requirements for operating as a legal non-profit do not fall through the cracks. Record-keeping has improved immensely. And many members are expressing their appreciation for improvements they are already experiencing in member services and internal communications.

Council is now engaged in implementing the next step — hiring an Executive Director. A nationwide search yielded a selection of highly experienced, engaging candidates and the search committee has sent its recommendations to Council.

Where is the money coming from for this?

Everybody working with science and conservation is painfully aware that raising money is difficult and time-consuming. Hiring employees, such as an Executive Director and a Director of Transition, is certainly expensive. However, no member dues are paying for this transition. IBA has secured \$200,000 in grants from an anonymous donor specifically to fund staff and other costs through about 18 months of the transition process. In addition, IBA Council last year unanimously voted to invest \$40,000 into its own future, funded out of growth in IBA's invested assets. The Director of Transition and especially the Executive Director are hired with the understanding that employment beyond the grant monies IBA has procured for transition will be contingent upon their success in developing sustainable funding sources. Thus, IBA will remain financially sound, even if the Executive Director does not produce and the transition cannot continue. Should this happen, then IBA can fall back to its all-volunteer based structure.

That said, IBA Council would never have started on this path if there was not a very good chance of success. Many career philanthropists and fundraisers have advised us that IBA has



a very good chance of being successful in this transformation. Even without strong skill sets to fund-raise effectively, BCF chairs Karen Noyce and Julia Bevins, with key assistance from John Hechtel and others, have managed to quintuple annual BCF donations for grants in the past 15 years. However, the fund-raising world can be brutal, and this is exactly why we plan to hire an Executive Director skilled in fundraising.

The future is now!

Coming to this point has been a long, cautious, and gradual process, and very much a team effort among IBA's Executive Committee, Council, Committee Chairs, and members. We are excited by the possibilities ahead to enhance our core mission. Importantly, the transition does not change IBA's mission, goals, or core values as articulated in the Bylaws. Rather, these administrative changes should enable IBA to break out of the severe time and resource constraints of being an all-volunteer organization. We understand that these changes may raise concerns among some of you, but we have been very careful and deliberate and see little risk to IBA in implementing these first steps. After all, many other professional organizations, such as The Wildlife Society, have successfully taken similar steps.

IBA absolutely possesses the potential to grow and provide more benefits for its members as well as for bear research, management, and conservation worldwide. Imagine an IBA in which the professional programs (conferences, networking, publications, training) and grants programs work synergistically; where resources are available to assure that all grant recipients can attend IBA conferences, both for their own professional growth and so that all IBA members can learn in real time from the experiences of those IBA is financially supporting in the field; where IBA can provide more grants for student travel to conferences, for experience and exchange, and for other types of training; where IBA can meaningfully support larger or longer-term projects such as distribution surveys, long-term monitoring, or community conservation initiatives, and can work in partnership with other organizations to help fund the development and implementation of sound conservation plans. We, as past and current IBA presidents, hope and trust that future presidents and Councils will continue on this forward-oriented path for the greater good of IBA, its members, and, most importantly, the future of bears worldwide!

-Andreas, Karen Frank, and Harry