To: RMBL Community
From: Ian Billick and Brett Biebuyck
RE: Evaluation of 2023 Operations and 2024 Goals
Date: Jan. 11, 2024

With short days and cold temperatures, we are in the depths of winter. But summer will be here sooner than we think!

We perform an annual evaluation of operations, typically involving an online survey, exit interviews, anecdotal observations, and discussion by staff. We open this evaluation up to the larger community so that you can understand how we see things, create accountability by staff to the community by evaluating progress on meeting goals, and to create an additional platform for community feedback. If there is something in the analysis below and/or goals for 2024 that you think is missing, or could be improved upon, please let us know! We are here to serve the scientists and what you think matters to us!

This memo includes:

1. Planned goals and changes for 2024;
2. How we think we did in 2023, including a review of goals we had for 2023;
3. A look at RMBL big picture, within which our operations are embedded;
4. And an overview of what we consider larger trends that impact operations.

Operations

2024 Goals and Changes

Promote DEI Initiatives: We will focus on maintaining existing relationships, especially LA community colleges and local K-12 schools as well as building targeted new relationships (Ute community, St. Philips in Dallas, Montrose and Delta public schools) with a focus on understanding and being responsive to the needs of those communities. We will focus on initiatives that we are uniquely qualified to support, as well as initiatives that are grounded in the history of our landscape. To maintain diversity in our undergraduate program we will prioritize renewal of the REU program, utilize RMBL undergraduate scholarships to support diversity, and seek RET funding. We will use fellowship support to support a diverse research community, as well as consider diversity when engaging faculty and mentors. We will explore how best to develop language recognizing the indigenous history in the local landscape with the goal of eventually requiring training through the community portal. We will continue to support visits by RMBL staff and community to the Ute museum. We will continue to support UTE STEM programming in the local schools. We will continue to support the community diversity committee, maintaining 2023 funding levels despite broad cutbacks, and continue the annual diversity survey.

Improved incident management and communications: We will develop more standardized methods for managing and communicating incidents (e.g., onsite accidents, fire concerns), preparing for less of an onsite presence by Ian Billick and Jennifer Reithel.

New system for managing mapping: We will implement an improved and more efficient system for managing research site mapping.

Continued incremental improvements to fire mitigation: Despite limited funding, we will continue to make incremental improvements (e.g., 1 or 2 buildings) to mitigate fire risks.

Parking: We will manage onsite parking better, with less parking in the county road.

Reduced 2024 Expenditures: Understanding and doing our best to mitigate the impacts on services, we will take a number of measures to reduce costs, including eliminating the courier position, reducing fellowship support for scientists, and reducing weekend office support.

Operational Goals for 2023

Mitigate Fire Risk: We created defensible spaces around and hardened the Natural History Building and Cinnamon Cabin, as well as created a community fire pit and campfire safety training.

Add Functionality to Community Portal, including a community calendar: Because of budget cuts we delayed adding functionality around invoicing until 2024 and 2025. As an easier implemented alternative to a portal-based event scheduling system, we added a comprehensive website-based community calendar with event type filtering functions and the ability for community members to post events. Required conduct training was added to the Community Portal, as well as multiple optional or activity-based trainings.

Open bbcc 24 hours: Implemented.

Improve showerhouse: With a new showerhouse coming online and to save costs, we made few changes to the washhouse.

Improve management of shared living spaces: We developed and displayed expectations and best practices for shared living environments in most cabins, deployed an optional (or assigned) training on communal living in the portal, and reinstituted regular condition checkouts of cabins for departures.

Improve bike management: With delays in upgrades to the portal, we were not able to make community eBikes available until July. However, eventually we deployed a portal-based ebike training and orientation in tandem with an in-person practical skills test, allowing for community checkout of eBikes. We more extensively maintained the fleet of community pedal bikes as well as four nicer mountain bikes and trailers available with checkout,

Improve shoulder and winter housing: We made upgrades to Galena and Richards Cabins in the fall of 2022 and demonstrated the four-season operability of both cabins over the winter.

Additional achievements for 2023

DEI: We implemented bystander intervention training, deployed a required conduct and safety training and quiz in the Community Portal, supported a community visit to the Ute Indian Museum in Montrose, and added a permanent installation of materials approved by all three Ute Tribes to the Visitor's Center,

Facilities Improvements: We restored a patio to Cinnamon, electrified appliances in the Doctor's Cabin, upgraded living facilities in weather ports, improved the Maxfield Meadow camping spots, and added gravel in the fall of 2023 to improve driveways and parking lots.

SAIL and Splash Decommissioning: We supported the removal of field equipment and infrastructure and started remediation of disturbed sites, in Gothic, on Mt. CB, and at other sites around the Gunnison Valley.

Results of 2023 Operational Survey

We had 71 responses to the survey, up from 66 in 2022. 97% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that RMBL operations run smoothly. When asked about investing in operations, investing more in maintenance of living facilities gets the most support, followed closely by improved food quality and then the website. General satisfaction with the dining hall was quite high, at 88% excellent or good, though down from 98% the prior year. However, we saw a significant drop in

contentment with food quality, with only 65% of respondents indicating the food was excellent or good, relative to 85% the previous year. The facilities crew (97% excellent or good), research support staff (95%), and the admin office (93%) all rated well.

RMBL's Big Picture

2023 Financial Results and 2024 Budget: There is no question that 2023 was a challenging year in terms of finances and staffing. In 2022 there was a national bump in philanthropy that did not carry into 2023, with federal covid support in 2021 and 2022 also drying up. Declines in operational income as the atmospheric projects wound down putting additional downward pressure on RMBL's finances. On the positive side, the K-12 program began covering all its costs in 2023 and we project that the Spatial Data Platform will start covering all its costs in 2024. While RMBL ran a large deficit in 2023, we began adjusting expenditures in January of 2023, reducing the cost of summer operations, with anticipated further reductions in seasonal staffing and associated services in 2024. We are projecting that we will be close to break-even in financial results for 2024, which we have achieved by significantly reducing spending on senior level staffing and eliminating retirement and group health care benefits, though increasing spending on key staff with a focus on mid-level, year-round staff.

Endowment and Financial Reserves: We have seen healthy growth in the RMBL's endowment, with the endowment growing to approximately $3 million. In addition to a rebound in the markets, we saw the establishment of a new undergraduate endowment in honor of Rosemary Smith, generous donations from David and Bonnie Inouye to an endowment in support of long-term research, and some significant donations to the general endowment and Langenheim endowment in support of graduate students. RMBL also holds $1 million in its reserves as proceeds from placing a conservation easement on the Gothic townsite.

Executive Director Search: With a planned departure date of June 1, 2025 for Ian, RMBL scientist Lara Souza is leading the transition process, with a core search committee that tentatively includes Susan Avery, Brett Biebuyck, Berry Brosi, Carol Johnson, and Kailen Mooney. The committee anticipates releasing a job ad soon, with the goal of interviewing candidates in Gothic this summer.

Year-Round Staffing Changes: There have been numerous staffing changes. Lisa Lucas stepped down from the development position. Erik Hulm has been appointed the Director of Institutional Advancement (which was formerly our Development Director position). We have returned to historic levels of development staffing, hiring Ericka Bremer (who volunteered as a docent in 2023) to assist Erik. Jennifer Garver stepped down as Chief Financial Officer; we will be hiring a virtual, part-time Chief Financial Officer this spring, who we anticipate will work 5-10 hours/week. Ben Calvin has received a promotion; he will be Director of Finance, replacing much of the role previously served by Jennifer. Steve Jennison will be working half-time on facilities with Benn Schmatz taking more responsibility for operations of facilities. With Shannon Sprott accepting a full-time position in the spring of 2023, Amanda Henderson will be handling mapping of research sites, as well as supporting the spatial data platform and assisting Jennie Reithel with research administration.

Facilities: With financial support from NSF and generous donor Doug LaFollette, we anticipate breaking ground on a new washhouse this summer, addressing one of our biggest areas of complaints for onsite users.

Land Holdings: After communicating with the family and friends of Scottie and Bob Willey, RMBL's Board made the hard decision to list the Cebolla Creek property for sale. With a listing price well above $2 million, a successful sale will help increase RMBL's reserves as it goes through some major transitions, while helping ensure acquisition of the North Village property. RMBL also holds a building lot in CB South, which has approximately doubled in value since it was purchased several years ago and could also support housing.

Strategic Plan: Led by RMBL scientist Kailen Mooney, the RMBL Board adopted an updated strategic plan at the November meeting. The strategic plan emphasizes: 1. Driving scientific discovery by combining the power of place-based research with new technologies, with an emphasis on supporting scientists and long-term research, creating a data research environment, increasing RMBL's capacity to support science across the year, promoting synthesis and collaboration, integrating the larger world with RMBL science, and supporting strategic partnerships; 2. Creating institutional resilience and stability through strong staffing including staffing transitions, enhancing RMBL's financial sustainability, and facilities improvements within Gothic and supporting year-round operations; and 3. Promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion through diversifying the RMBL community, ensuring an inclusive environment, and monitoring community outcomes.

Land Use: With the goals of effectively managing the urban-backcountry interface at the Snodgrass trailhead, controlling operational costs by ensuring cost-effective staff housing, addressing pressure on seasonal staff and RMBL scientists that are getting squeezed out of Crested Butte housing, and providing opportunities to support year-round research and education programming, North Village continues to be a RMBL priority. Approval of North Village by Mt. Crested Butte has been delayed, though final plan review is on track to start this winter, with final approval likely this summer/fall. The combination of escalating construction costs and Ian's departure create uncertainty around when RMBL will start construction. However, RMBL's Board has indicated that it will be a priority to acquire a roughly six-acre parcel with the rights to build approximately 50,000 square feet of space (half housing, half programming/operations), at a cost of $2 million for the land.

RMBL saw some other advances in land use with the release of the GMUG Forest Plan, which removes Snodgrass from ski area operations and prioritizes the valley around Gothic for research and education. While the final plan has been released, the plan is going through the final litigation stages, which will be resolved in 2024. Senator Michael Bennet intends to introduce legislation, the Gunnison Outdoor Resources Projection (GORP) Act that would provide congressional-level prioritization of research and education for the valley.

Larger Societal Trends

Covid19: Coming up on our fifth summer after the emergence of Covid19, while there is no return to pre-covid days, we are definitely into whatever the new normal looks like! We continue to work on balancing the needs of the different demographic groups. Older scientists have every reason to continue to be cautious, being wary of enclosed spaces with lots of people. There is no doubt that younger scientists have experienced significant lost opportunities. We are still figuring it out!

Changing Workplace Dynamics and Inflation: The workplace is different! Everybody is trying to find more of a balance between personal spaces and the workplace. This impacts how RMBL scientists spend time in Gothic and how they volunteer, as well as what we can reasonably expect

of RMBL staff. In general, we are seeing lots of inflationary pressure on the costs of operating RMBL, from increased costs of goods and services, to changes in workplace productivity.
There is increased emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion, but also a lot of conversation on how to do it well, reaching broad stakeholder groups.

Climate Change, Fire, and Land Use Pressure: We call out two ways that climate change will impact RMBL. First, increasing fire frequency and intensity will put pressure on RMBL's operations and complicate management of our physical infrastructure. Second, humans will join other organisms moving up the elevational gradient to escape the negative impacts of climate change, increasing tourism pressure on RMBL and escalating land/housing costs.