

SCB Local Chapters Survey Working Group Report

Report to the Society for Conservation Biology Board of Governors: Executive Summary and Recommendations

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In Response to the Membership Bylaw Change of Spring 2006: Perspectives from SCB Local Chapters on the Relationship between Chapters and SCB-Global

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Background

The following survey was created in response to the membership bylaw change, approved by the SCB Board of Governors in Spring 2006, in which all chapter members are also required to be members of the parent SCB organization. Many chapters expressed concern at this change and were particularly vocal at the SCB annual meeting in June of 2007 in San Jose, California. As a result, the Chapters Advisory Committee designed this survey to measure actual membership numbers of chapters as well as to assess the concerns, challenges, and contributions of chapters. The goal was to enable a better understanding of chapter needs and to find ways to enable implementation of the bylaw change.

The survey was announced to the Chapters listserv on November 29, 2006, and Chapters were asked to respond by December 8, 2006. It was administered through the online survey tool, Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com), and used multiple-choice and short-answer formats. Responses were averaged and compiled to reflect the opinions of 18 different Chapters, representing roughly 47% of currently active and forming Chapters.

Answers to Section II below (“Chapter and SCB Membership”) represent approximately 34% (600 people) of active chapters. Extrapolating from these numbers, there are approximately 1800 total chapter members, which equals roughly 13% of SCB-affiliated people. Approximately 600 chapter members are SCB-Global members. Numbers and percentages are subject to sampling error.

Executive Summary

Many SCB Chapters are well-established and have developed their own membership base, activities, etc. Chapters feel like they are making many contributions to the parent society, but also use and appreciate many of the resources provided by SCB. SCB also appreciates the work that Chapters do, and acknowledges their role in the Society. However, Chapters need to be better informed of the resources available to them through SCB, and they need to be kept abreast of changes that might affect them. Currently, many chapters feel alienated and somewhat threatened by the way the membership bylaw change was made and announced in the spring of 2006.

Chapters have legitimate concerns about the implementation of a membership policy change:

- The ability for members to pay the extra SCB dues (especially by students and in developing country Chapters)
- The willingness of individuals to pay the extra SCB dues
- Enforcement of the change
- The lack of chapter input in the initial BOG decision

Some concerns on enforcement are that:

- It is difficult for chapters to ‘police’ who is a member and who is not
- Chapters might lose members if it’s not free anymore
- Chapters need to be able to convince their members why they should join SCB global

The concerns of developing country chapters and NA chapters were the same.

Recommendations

I) SCB needs to help chapters with enforcement by making membership compliance easier for chapters and individuals. Based on the survey results, we recommend a program of incentives and services for chapters to address the issue of willingness to pay, ie, special services for a compliant chapter that it would not receive otherwise, and incentives for individuals as a compliant chapter/SCB member.

Possible incentives/services for chapters include:

- Web services (already exists)
- Supplies and promotional materials from the SCB Executive Office (already exists)
- Chapter grants (already exists)
- A ‘welcome’ packet for new chapters and for all chapters at registration time (via email and hard copy), to include SCB brochures on benefits of membership for individuals and chapters
- A web link from the online SCB membership form to chapter main page

Possible incentives for individuals include:

- A reduced SCB fee if already a chapter member (rationale: if 100 people are not currently SCB members, then even just \$5 per new SCB member is \$5 more than SCB had before. Helps bring in new SCB global members and also doesn’t scare off chapter members who may then be paying a higher dues than before).
- Targeted marketing by the SCB Executive Office for specific demographics -- eg a brochure on “10 Reasons to Join SCB as a Grad and Undergrad Student”

II) On the issue of ability to pay, we suggest one or more the following measures:

- OPTION 1) waivers for disadvantaged people (eg students, developing countries), or complimentary memberships
- OPTION 2) group membership
- OPTION 3) % of chapter members as SCB members as sufficient
- OPTION 4) proportion of chapter dues to SCB (eg not the full \$10/person)

Temporary measures:

- Sponsored memberships for developing country chapters (SCB has a 2-year grant from TNC especially for this purpose)
- Phase in the compliance (ie 20% members by XX date, 50% by some XX later date, etc)

III) On the issue of chapter input on future changes, we suggest a mechanism be created to allow chapters a more direct voice on matters that directly affect them (in addition to the voice provided by the BOG liaison). In the case of this bylaw change, chapters could have helped the BOG to understand the difficulties they face with enforcement and to find a feasible solution for implementation.