Panel Summary

Biological Diversity of the Guiana Shield

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The panelists and external reviewers were unanimous in their praise of the stewardship of the BDG over its 20+ year history and the impressive accomplishments of the Program including numerous publications, collections, and outreach. The Program directors have also managed a significant amount of leverage of SI and other resources, which is quite noteworthy. The collections effort has been very significant for the Department of Botany and the BDG staff has aided the department in other curatorial activities. Important new directions for the Program are the addition of the environmental niche modeling and expansion of the mission to include greater emphasis on insects with the concomitant transfer of leadership to the Entomology collaborators. These new directions promise greater visibility of the Program beyond the botanical community with great potential for high impact products.

The Review Panel did have a number of concerns about the proposal. An emphasis on niche modeling is an important move for the Program, but this initiative doesn’t seem to be integrated with the collecting effort. The fact that two separate budgets were submitted suggests a lack of integration and communication between the two management teams. The Review Panel also noted that many of these environments have a long history of human activity. Therefore, collaboration with anthropologists and true partnering with traditional peoples, including indigenous knowledge of plants and insects, would provide an important additional perspective on biodiversity in this region. The Panel also noted the lack of inclusion of material from BDG in EOL, as cited by one of the external reviewers.

Recommendations: In view of these concerns, and out of a desire to provide funding to as many proposals as possible, the Review Panel recommends funding this proposal at $70,000 per year for 3 years, with continued funding contingent on satisfactory progress. The Panel STRONGLY recommends that during this 3 year funding window the Program focus their efforts on the ecological niche modeling (ENM), with less emphasis on collection building, and use this work to inform future collecting efforts. The collection component could be re-expanded later with the insights of ENM.