

NSC Alliance Washington Report, Volume 2, Issue 13, October 31, 2011

In this Issue:

- Action Alert: Remind Lawmakers to Invest in Science in FY 2012
- Senate Rejects Effort to Cut Archeological Research
- USGS to Terminate NBII Program
- Lawmakers Share Views with Deficit Reduction Super Committee
- Radio Program Explores How Natural Science Collections Contribute to Understanding of Oysters in Ecosystems

Policy News from NSC Alliance

Through the NSC Alliance partnership with the American Institute of Biological Sciences, we are pleased to provide NSC Alliance members with the following public policy update. If you have any questions or require additional information regarding any of the following items, please contact NSC Alliance director of public policy Dr. Robert Gropp at 202-628-1500 x 250 or at rgropp@aibs.org.

Action Alert: Remind Lawmakers to Invest in Science in FY 2012

Some congressional champions for scientific research have warned that science needs a louder voice if cuts to federal research programs are to be avoided in fiscal year (FY 2012). It is imperative that scientists, educators, and students communicate with Congress now. Even if you have recently sent a letter to your members of Congress, please consider contacting your Senators and Representative again today to encourage them to provide at least the House-proposed funding level for the National Science Foundation (NSF) for FY 2012.

The United States Senate is poised to vote on an appropriations bill that would significantly cut funding for NSF. Under the proposed legislation, \$120.9 million would be cut from the Research and Related Activities account at NSF. This is the account that provides funding for NSF's various research directorates, such as the Biological Sciences Directorate.

Both the House and the Senate have developed legislation that would cut funding for Education and Human Resources programs at NSF, but the House would cut roughly \$6 million less than the Senate.

If enacted, these cuts would be damaging to NSF programs and counter to bipartisan pledges of support for scientific research and education.

If the Senate fails to increase funding for NSF, it is almost guaranteed that the agency will receive a significant budget cut. It is important that all scientists concerned about funding for NSF share their concerns. Contact your lawmakers today to urge them to oppose Senate

proposed cuts to the National Science Foundation and to support at least the funding level proposed by the House Appropriations Committee for NSF in FY 2012.

Please help those in Congress who are trying to help science – send a letter today at <http://capwiz.com/aibs/issues/alert/?alertid=55325501>.

Senate Rejects Effort to Cut Archeological Research

All archeological research and planning associated with federal transit projects would have been halted under a proposal offered by Senator John McCain (R-AZ). Senator McCain was targeting what he argued is “lower-priority projects” funded by the Department of Transportation. In addition to archeological work, funding would have been barred for historic preservation, the establishment of transportation museums, and highway beautification. The Senate ended debate on the McCain amendment with a 59-39 vote and is not expected to vote on adoption of the amendment.

The issue arose as the Senate was considering a package of three appropriations bills for fiscal year 2012, which started nearly a month ago. The chamber is expected to consider several more amendments tomorrow before voting on final passage of the bill. A similar amendment from Senator Rand Paul (R-KY) could be debated. Paul’s amendment would cut all funding for transportation enhancement activities, which includes pedestrian safety, scenic highways, and historic preservation, and redirect it to repairing bridges. Among the activities that could be cut is archeological research, preservation planning, interpretation of archaeological artifacts, and curation for artifacts related to surface transportation and artifacts recovered from locations within or along surface transportation corridors.

USGS to Terminate NBII Program

Users of the United States Geological Survey’s (USGS) National Biological Information Infrastructure (NBII) will soon have to look elsewhere for data on the nation’s biological resources. The USGS announced last month that NBII will be shutdown on 15 January 2012. This means that nbii.gov and any associated applications or tools on USGS or partner websites will no longer be available.

The program’s termination was originally proposed in President Obama’s budget for fiscal year (FY) 2012. Congress, however, accelerated budget reductions for the program. As a result, the USGS was forced to begin to terminate NBII in FY 2011.

NBII is a network of nodes that focus on thematic and regional issues, such as invasive species, bird conservation, and wildlife disease. The program’s website includes numerous tools for scientists and natural resource managers, on topics ranging from fish habitat to protected lands.

Lawmakers Share Views with Deficit Reduction Super Committee

In recent weeks, numerous voices in Congress have shared policy priorities with the super committee about options for reducing the nation's budget deficit. The super committee, more formally known as the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction, was soliciting suggestions on how to meet its charge of cutting at least \$1.2 trillion from federal spending over the next decade.

Although many Senate and House committees, as well as individual lawmakers, provided comments to the super committee, there was little mention of science, either as an area to cut or to protect. The notable exception was the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee. In separate letters from most of the Republican members and the senior Democrat on the panel, Science, Space, and Technology Committee members shared their recommendations for federal investments in scientific research and education programs.

Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX), the ranking Democrat on the Science Committee, wrote in support of science as a driver of economic growth. "I strongly support continued federal investment in science and technology as an important component of any serious effort to achieve long-term deficit reduction." Her letter goes on to state that "[i]t is clear that federal investments in R&D [research and development] bring significant returns for decades to come....I urge you...to do whatever it takes to prioritize steady growth of our investments in science, technology, and STEM [science, technology, engineering, and mathematics] education."

A letter from Chairman Ralph Hall (R-TX) and ten other Republicans who serve on the Science Committee supports federal investments in select research programs, but recommends cutting \$1.5 billion from research and development in fiscal year (FY) 2012. The letter supports funding the National Science Foundation (NSF) at \$6.86 billion, the same amount as the House Appropriations Committee would provide in FY 2012. However, the lawmakers would like to see reductions in the Science, Engineering and Education for Sustainability (SEES) program, climate change activities, and the Education and Human Resources program at NSF.

The Republicans also call for reductions to climate and environmental programs at other agencies. They argue for reduced spending on National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's climate research, and climate and weather satellite acquisition. The letter also recommends zeroing out the Environmental Protection Agency's global change research. The Department of Energy Office of Science stands out as a clear winner, to "be protected from cuts by the Joint Committee." Despite this strong statement, the Republican lawmakers call for a 10 percent reduction to the Biological and Environmental Research program within the Office of Science.

Radio Program Explores How Natural Science Collections Contribute to Understanding of Oysters in Ecosystems

Peter Roopnarine, a curator with the California Academy of Science, and Paul Callomon, collections manager with the Academy of Natural Science, appeared on Radio Times with Marty Moss-Coane. The program aired on WHYY radio in Philadelphia.

According to the station's website, "While some people may see oysters as only a delicious delicacy, researchers are using them to understand the long term environmental impact of the Gulf oil spill. Oyster shells turn out to hold important clues about past ecological disasters. This hour, the importance of oysters – more than just good eating, these mollusks play a key role in the ecosystem."

Information about the program, including a link to the broadcast, is available at:

<http://www.linkedin.com/redirect?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwhy.org%2Fcms%2Fradiotimes%2F2010%2F07%2F21%2Foysters-and-the-ecosystem%2F&urlhash=LBOq&trk=&ut=1Bc65rRZACiQY1>.

The Natural Science Collections Alliance is a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit association that serves as an advocate for natural science collections, the institutions that preserve them, and the research and education that extend from them for the benefit of science, society, and stewardship of the environment. NSC Alliance members are part of an international community of museums, botanical gardens, herbariums, universities, and other institutions that house natural science collections and utilize them in research, exhibitions, academic and informal science education, and outreach activities. Website: www.NSCAlliance.org.

Note: You are receiving a copy of this electronic report as part of your membership in the NSC Alliance. Contact the Alliance office with any email address or member representative name changes send an email to spotter@aibs.org.