

NSC Alliance Washington Report

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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

Scientists Express Concern for Peruvian Museum

Biologists and scientific organizations recently expressed concern for the preservation and appropriate curation of specimens held in the Museo de Historia Natural of San Marcos University in Lima, Peru. University officials were considering plans to develop new space for the university's graduate school and new facilities for the museum. The problem, according to some scientists familiar with the issue, was that the plans did not address the need for appropriate temporary space for the preservation and curation of the museum's specimens.

Several scientific organizations, including NSC Alliance, encouraged the President of the University of San Marcos to work closely with museum curators to ensure that no specimens are lost or damaged.

It appears that outreach by the international scientific community may have given the museum a temporary reprieve. On 19 November, the university council decided to halt the redevelopment plans while a special commission considers possible locations for the university's graduate school. However, at least one source reports that the museum's current location is still under consideration.

Read the letters sent by NSC Alliance and some other scientific organizations at <http://nscalliance.org/?p=339>.

NSC Alliance, Nine Other Science Groups Ask Congress to Pass FY 2011 Science Appropriations

On 17 November 2010, the NSC Alliance joined nine other scientific organizations to send letters to the Chairmen and Ranking Republican Members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees requesting that Congress pass a fiscal year 2011 appropriations bill that would provide the National Science Foundation (NSF) with \$7.424 billion. This funding level has been endorsed by President Obama and the House Appropriations subcommittee with jurisdiction over the NSF's budget.

Congress has yet to finalize any of the twelve spending bills required to fund the government in fiscal year 2011, which began on 1 October 2010. Congress passed a Continuing Resolution in September that maintains the fiscal year 2010 level of funding for agencies until early December.

To read the letter, visit <http://nscalliance.org/?p=336>.

Nations Set New Biodiversity Conservation Goals, Agree to Benefits Sharing

The Convention on Biological Diversity has new targets for preserving and protecting global biodiversity. The agreement reached by the 193 parties to the convention aims to halve the rate of loss of natural habitats, protect 17 percent of terrestrial and 10 percent of marine ecosystems, and restore 15 percent of degraded environments globally. The new strategic plan aims to meet these goals by 2020. Nations have two years to create an implementation strategy. Parties also agreed to substantially increase financial support to achieve these goals, including a pledge from Japan for \$2 billion in financing.

The new conservation goals are not without critics. As reported by BBC News, the targets "are regarded as too small by many conservation scientists, who point out that about 13% of the land is already protected - while the existing target for oceans is already 10%." Others are concerned that the new agreement doesn't do enough to ensure that countries meet the goals; many of the goals from the last conference on the Convention on Biological Diversity were not met.

A historic agreement was also reached regarding the sharing of benefits derived from genetic resources. Developing nations have long accused developed nations of profiting from their genetic resources through the manufacturing of pharmaceuticals and other products derived from naturally occurring compounds. The new agreement would allow nations to set terms for benefits sharing in order to allow international access to genetic resources. The benefits sharing agreement is expected to enter into force by 2012.

Taxonomists Plan for Big Push to Describe All Species on Earth

Taxonomists are pushing for a large scale mission to find and describe all of the species on the planet. Spearheaded by scientists at Arizona State University, the effort was launched at a recent meeting of taxonomists, informatics experts, ecologists, sociologists, and computer scientists. The meeting was organized by Quentin Wheeler, a member of the NSC Alliance Board of Directors. The group hopes to increase the number of species formally described each year to 200,000, a tenfold increase over the current rate.

2010 Elections: Congress Fills with New Politicians

The results from the 2 November 2010 mid-term elections mean big changes for Congress next year. In addition to the Republicans regaining control of the House of Representatives, the 112th Congress will have more than 100 new members. The vast majority of the incoming lawmakers lack extensive political experience. The Washington Post has described the new House as “an everyman’s roost.” The incoming freshmen class of Senators, however, are for the most part veteran politicians who have previously served as elected officials.

These changes may be significant for the nation’s science policy. Several senior members of the House of Representatives who have been strong advocates for investments in science either retired from Congress or were defeated in the mid-term elections. The absence of these champions for science may be particularly significant given the cohort of recently elected Tea Partiers and Republicans who campaigned with promises of budget cuts. The campaign platform that many House Republicans ran on promised to “cut government spending to pre-stimulus, pre-bailout levels.”

Action on climate change may also be impacted, as most of the new members oppose action to address climate change. In a speech given the day after the election, President Obama signaled his intention to abandon cap-and-trade, at least for now. “Cap-and-trade was just one way of skinning the cat; it was not the only way,” said the President. “I’m going to be looking for other means to address this problem.” Some policymakers are hoping to take smaller steps to mitigate climate change, such as increasing energy production from renewable sources and nuclear power — options that have bipartisan support.

Efforts to reform the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, better known as “No Child Left Behind,” could also be impacted. Some policy experts predict that there will be greater pressure to reduce the federal government’s role in education. Despite this, bipartisan support for education reform is likely. Republican lawmakers have already expressed support for central elements of the Obama administration’s education plan, including promoting charter schools, linking teacher pay to student test scores, and providing greater flexibility to successful school districts.

Encyclopedia of Life Selects New Executive Director

The Encyclopedia of Life, a collaborative project that aims to gather and share knowledge about all species on the planet, has a new executive director, Dr. Erick Mata. Mata is currently the Director of Biodiversity Informatics and Education at the National Biodiversity Institute of Costa Rica. Dr. Jim Edwards, who previously held the position, retired on May 30, 2010 and now serves as a Senior Advisor to EOL.

Dr. Mata served as the chair of the Global Biodiversity Information Facility's (GBIF) Outreach and Capacity Building Scientific Subcommittee from 2001 to 2005 and as the chair of GBIF's Science Committee from 2007 to 2009. He has worked as the Coordinator of the Inter American Biodiversity Information Network Species and Specimen Thematic Network from 2006 to the present.

Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Review Committee Seeks Nominations

The National Park Service is soliciting nominations for two members of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Review Committee. The Secretary of the Interior will appoint the two members from nominations submitted by national museum organizations and scientific organizations. Committee members serve a four year term. The Review Committee normally meets face-to-face two times per year, with each meeting lasting two or three days. Nominations must be received by December 20, 2010. For more information, visit <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2010/2010-26464.htm>.

Join Collection Colleagues on LinkedIn

A new online group has formed to encourage networking among natural science collections leaders. This group offers an opportunity for individuals from collections across the nation to identify and discuss common public policy issues, or other common challenges they face as natural science collections professionals.

To join this group you must first join LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com). There is no cost for creating a profile on this site. Once you have registered, simply search the Groups function for "Natural Science Collections Leadership." Membership in this group is limited to natural science collections professionals, but there is no cost to join or participate in group discussions or events.

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.