

## **NSC ALLIANCE WASHINGTON REPORT**

### **January 6, 2010**

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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](mailto:rgropp@aibs.org)

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#### **Inspector General Finds Fault with Interior's Management of Collections**

The Inspector General (IG) for the Department of the Interior (DOI) has “found that DOI is failing to fulfill its stewardship responsibilities over museum collections.” In a December 2009 report, the IG found that DOI has failed to properly accession, catalogue, or inventory museum collections, leaving artifacts “unavailable for research, education, or display and ... subject to theft, deterioration, and damage.”

The most widespread problem is a failure to properly document museum holdings. The IG reports that as of fiscal year 2007, DOI had not catalogued 53 percent of their collection holdings. Although several bureaus within DOI have backlogs of objects to be catalogued, the National Park Service has the worst backlog, with 60 million uncatalogued objects. Additionally, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, and Fish and Wildlife Service have failed to conduct annual inventories of collections to verify the existence of objects within their collections. DOI estimates that it will take at least 20 years to complete inventories of all Interior collections.

Moreover, the IG reports that DOI has paid too little attention to the management of DOI-collections held by other facilities. Four bureaus were not even sure what non-DOI facilities hold their collections. Where the facility is known, the bureau often did not maintain inventory listings or conduct the required annual physical inventory.

“These widespread accountability issues are largely due to poor program management, ineffective oversight, poor reporting, and an insufficient allocation of resources,” concludes the IG. Several of these problems date back to at least 1990, when the IG released a report on the

condition of DOI museum collections. In 1993, DOI implemented department-wide standards for collection management, however many bureaus within Interior have failed to follow that guidance.

The IG also found that lack of staff has been a major hindrance to proper collection management. Fish and Wildlife Service officials told the IG that the Service “simply lacks the staff, time, and funding to adequately respond to many of its conservation, cataloging, and curation issues.” National Park Service officials stated that staff “often has only a small percentage of time devoted to museum management with no technical oversight by a professional level curator.”

The report did note some instances of proper collection management. Among the best practices used by individual museums were partnerships with colleges and universities, consolidation of facilities, and developing site-specific procedures for cataloging and inventory.

The report makes a number of recommendations for improving collection management in DOI, including requiring all bureaus to comply with department-wide collections management policies; developing a plan to address the accession and cataloging backlog; and ensuring annual physical inventories. The IG also recommends consolidating collections and pursuing partnerships with outside organizations.

In response to the report, DOI voiced support to improve management of collections, although the department does not believe that the status of its collections is consistent with the IG’s report. Interior points to the number of improvements made since 1993, including a unified collection management system.

DOI is the second largest holder of museum collections, with an estimated 146 million artifacts and pieces of artwork at 625 DOI facilities and at more than 1,000 non-DOI facilities. Interior’s collections are comprised mostly of documents (60 percent) and archeological objects (35 percent). Approximately 82 percent of Interior’s collections are held by the National Park Service.

To read the IG report, please visit <http://www.doioig.gov/upload/2010-I-0005.pdf>.

### **NSF, NOAA, NIH to Receive Budget Increases in 2010**

Nearly three months after the 2010 fiscal year (FY) began, Congress has approved significant budget increases for several scientific agencies, including the National Science Foundation (NSF; 6.7 percent increase over FY 2009 appropriations, excluding the economic stimulus), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA; 8.6 percent increase), and the National Institutes of Health (NIH; 3.3 percent increase). The budgets for these agencies passed the House of Representatives and the Senate as part of a package of six appropriations bills (HR 3288) that were signed into law by President Obama on 16 December 2009.

The \$6.926 billion budget for NSF will keep the agency on a path to budget doubling over a ten year period. The Research and Related Activities (RR&A) accounts will receive most of the

\$436 million increase, with some of the funding increase going towards high-risk, high-reward basic research, ocean acidification research, support for 2,000 graduate fellowships, climate change education, and the Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR). The Education and Human Resources (HER) directorate will receive a \$27.5 million increase, while the budget for Major Research Equipment and Facilities Construction (MREFC) will decline by \$34.7 million.

The joint statement accompanying the bill calls for “formal reviews from both the NSF directorate and the Office of the Inspector General on the agency’s personnel management practices.” The Senate Appropriations Committee previously identified “systemic workforce management problems propagated from senior management creating a hostile work environment between Federal employees, rotational directors and the [Senior Executive Service]-level directorate,” and with the agency’s “enforcement of policies prohibiting gender discrimination, offensive work environments, and retaliation.” The joint statement also supported Senate language that addressed NSF grant management, calling for more performance evaluation of awarded grants.

Other science agencies included in the omnibus appropriations bill will also receive increased funding in FY 2010. NOAA will receive \$4.7 billion, \$372 million more than FY 2009, with some of the increase going to the Integrated Ocean Observing System (\$7.1 million additional), ocean acidification research (\$6.0 million additional), research on and management of marine protected species (\$41.2 million additional), ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes research (\$6.3 million additional), and competitive climate research (\$12.2 million additional). NIH will receive \$31 billion, a \$692 million increase. Of interest to some natural history museums, the Institute of Museum and Library Services will receive \$282.3 million, a \$7.4 million increase.

### **Senators Coburn and McCain Grumble About 'Wasteful' Science Spending**

On 8 December 2009, Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK), along with co-sponsor Senator John McCain (R-AZ), released a report entitled “Stimulus Checkup: A closer look at 100 projects funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.” The 55-page report takes aim at grants for arts and academic research projects, spending to boost tourism, improvements for leisure facilities, and administrative and advertising costs associated with the \$787 billion stimulus package. Supersonic jets, toxic clean-up efforts, and several educator-training programs also come under fire.

Coburn, who began the year opposing funding for museums, zoos and aquaria, uses this document to continue the attack on biological and environmental research. Many of the 100 projects referenced in the report are for biological science or biological science-related research projects. These projects range from animal systems studies aimed at understanding alcohol and drug use, to climate change research, to projects intended to improve curation of science collections. Some of these projects criticized include:

- A \$1.57 million NSF grant to researchers studying plant fossils in Argentina in order to understand the region’s biodiversity;

- A National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism grant for \$390,000 to study risk factors of alcohol abuse in young adults;
- A \$95,000 NSF grant to the University of Massachusetts to use pollen grains from Iceland in order to assess environmental variation and answer questions about the intersecting roles of landscape change and farm production;
- A \$210,00 grant to the University of Hawaii to study memory and taste in honeybees, the findings of which are expected to improve honeybee health;
- A NIH funded study on drinking and sexually-promiscuous behavior in female college students;
- A \$448,000 grant for a study measuring the affects of changing temperatures on wildflowers at the Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory;
- A National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) grant to protect wildlife and restore habitats along the Oregon coast by recovering crab pots, lines, and other marine debris;
- An NSF award to Duke University to send students to study tropical ecology and ecotourism at La Selva Biological Station in Costa Rica as part of the successful Organization for Tropical Studies (OTS) program;
- NSF grants to the University of Arizona and Arizona State University to study ant colony fitness;
- A \$187,632 grant to Michigan State University to combat carpet beetles which are destroying the extensive national and international holdings in their insect collection; and,
- An NSF-funded award to researchers studying behavioral dynamics of bird populations and how this behavior applies to sharing behavior in humans.

Coburn and McCain also took issue with the fact that 25,000 new government jobs were created in order to oversee and implement stimulus spending projects.

### **OSTP Requests Comments on Public Access to Scientific Literature**

The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) is considering the development of a new policy on public access to scientific literature resulting from federally funded research. A Federal Register notice published on 9 December 2009, states OSTP's intent to create a policy that increases access for the scientific community and the general public to scientific literature that results from research funded by federal science and technology agencies. Although no specific policy proposal has been released, OSTP is considering the model that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has implemented: all peer-reviewed manuscripts that result from research funded by NIH must be provided free of charge in an electronic database.

Comments on any aspect of expanding public access to peer reviewed publications arising from federal research are being accepted through 21 January 2010. For more information, please see the notice in the Federal Register at <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2009/E9-29322.htm>.

### **Publication Sheds Light on Collections' Response to Economic Downturn**

In 2008, the Natural Science Collections Alliance (NSC Alliance) conducted an online survey to assess how scientific collections were responding to worsening economic conditions. The

complete findings of this survey have now been published in the online CLS Journal of Museum Studies. The publication includes the survey results and possible actions for scientific collections and policymakers. This publication is available online at <http://nscalliance.org/?p=234>.

### **House Science and Technology Committee Losing Chairmen**

The House Science and Technology Committee will undergo a major change during the next Congress. Two of the Committee's senior Democrats have announced that they will not seek re-election.

Committee Chairman, Representative Bart Gordon (D-TN), will retire at the end of the 111th Congress. The 13-term Representative made his announcement on 14 December 2009. Gordon joined the committee as a freshman in 1985. He has been a strong supporter of research. Among his accomplishments is the American COMPETES Act, a law which reauthorized the budgets of the National Science Foundation, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and the Department of Energy Office of Science. Representative Jerry Costello (D-IL) is expected by many science policy watchers to replace Gordon as Committee Chairman; Costello is the second most senior Democrat on the committee.

In a surprise announcement on 9 December 2009, Representative Brian Baird (D-WA), Chairman of the House Science and Technology Subcommittee on Energy and Environment, announced that he will not seek re-election in 2010, citing his need to spend more time with his family. Baird, who has a PhD in clinical psychology, has ruffled feathers over the years, often voting against his party on issues like the Iraq war and health care reform. He has been a champion for science during his 12 years of service in Congress, and has sponsored such bills as the International Science and Technology Cooperation Act (HR 1736), legislation that would create a committee to coordinate all international science and technology activities among federal research agencies and the Department of State. Baird also sponsored HR 3247, a bill to establish a social and behavioral sciences research program at the Department of Energy.

### **New Plant Species Discovered in Botanic Gardens**

A recent article in the UK newspaper, The Guardian, highlights the importance of botanic garden plant collections to science and conservation. The report describes how a botanist at Kew Royal Botanic Gardens in West London discovered a new plant species during a lunchtime stroll through the Princess of Wales Conservatory. The new plant, now named *Isoglossa variegata*, was donated to Kew by Swedish botanists following an expedition to the Eastern Arc mountains of Tanzania in the 1990s. Kew gardeners had been using the plants as tropical bedding for over a decade, unaware that this was an undescribed species. The plant is among more than 250 new species discovered by the gardens' botanists in the past year.

To read the article, please go to <http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2009/dec/22/kew-gardens-new-plant-species>.

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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.com](http://www.NSCAlliance.com)

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