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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.

House Republicans Propose to Slash Funding in 2011

The new majority in the House of Representatives is moving forward with plans to reduce federal spending for the remainder of fiscal year (FY) 2011, which began on 1 October 2010. Science and almost all other non-security budgets have been targeted for cuts.

On 9 February, House Appropriations Chairman Hal Rogers (R-KY) proposed a reduction of \$74 billion, relative to the President's FY 2011 budget request, from an upcoming Continuing Resolution that would fund the government for the remaining seven months of FY 2011. That proposal would target 70 government agencies and programs for spending cuts, including:

- National Science Foundation: -\$139 million
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration: -\$336 million
- United States Geological Survey: -\$27 million
- Fish and Wildlife Service: -\$72 million
- National Park Service: -\$51 million
- Smithsonian Institution: -\$7.3 million
- Environmental Protection Agency: -\$1.6 billion
- National Institutes of Health: -\$1 billion
- Agriculture Research: -\$246 million
- Forest Service: -\$38 million
- Department of Energy, Office of Science: -\$1.1 billion

After fierce criticism from conservative lawmakers, Rogers announced on 10 February that he

would include additional reductions in the Continuing Resolution (CR) relative to the President's FY 2011 budget. Many Republican Representatives campaigned on a promise of reducing spending in FY 2011 by at least \$100 billion.

“After meeting with my subcommittee Chairs, we have determined that the CR can and will reach a total of \$100 billion in cuts compared to the President’s request immediately - fully meeting the goal outlined in the Republican ‘Pledge to America’ in one fell swoop,” said Rogers in a statement. “Our intent is to make deep but manageable cuts in nearly every area of government, leaving no stone unturned and allowing no agency or program to be held sacred. I have instructed my committee to include these deeper cuts, and we are continuing to work to complete this critical legislation.”

These additional reductions may make it even more difficult for the GOP-led House to eventually reach an agreement with the Democratic Senate. The clock is ticking for Congress to act, as the current spending bill for FY 2011 ends on 4 March.

New Series from NSC Alliance on the Importance of Scientific Collections

A new series of special reports from the NSC Alliance will provide an in-depth look at scientific collections and how scientists and others are utilizing them for research and to inform solutions to complicated problems. The first two reports in the series were created in partnership with the United States Geological Survey (USGS). One report, “Museum Specimens in the Service of Science: USGS and Smithsonian Partner to Advance Science” features USGS scientists who work at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History. The USGS Biological Survey Unit has stored its specimens at the museum since 1889. The second report, “Bees Are Not Optional: To Know How Bees Fare, You Must Know Who They Are” focuses on an effort led by the USGS to create an online identification guide for North American bees.

NSC Alliance members who have suggestions for topics of other reports should contact Robert Gropp at rgropp@aibs.org.

To download the reports, visit <http://nscalliance.org/?p=360>.

Effort to Digitize National Archives Could Cost \$1.4 Billion

The costs of a project by the federal government to develop a digital system for archiving its records could go as much as 41 percent over budget, according to the Government Accountability Office (GAO). The effort to digitize the documents preserved at the National Archives and to provide the public with online access to them has fallen behind schedule and is projected to run over budget. GAO blames the agency's weak oversight and planning of the project. The Archives "has not been positioned to identify potential cost and schedule problems early and thus has not been able to take timely actions to correct problems and avoid program schedule delays and cost increases," the GAO wrote in a recent report.

Since the contract for design of the electronic archives system was awarded to Lockheed Martin six years ago, the project has repeatedly come under fire from government watchdogs. Last year, the Office of Management and Budget identified it as one of the most troubled information technology investments in the federal government. As a result of that assessment, the National Archives was ordered to reduce the scope of the project. Now, the public will only be able to search the subject lines of documents, rather than the full text as was originally planned. The online archives are scheduled to be launched in the fall of 2011.

Majority of American Students Not Proficient in Science

According to the results of the latest version of The Nation's Report Card, 66 percent of fourth graders, 70 percent of eighth graders, and 79 percent of twelfth graders did not score at the 'proficient' level or higher on the 2009 science assessment. Even more troubling is the high proportion of students who failed to achieve a 'basic' understanding of scientific concepts (28 percent of fourth graders, 37 percent of eighth graders, and 40 percent of 12 graders). Less than 2 percent of students in each of the grades achieved an 'advanced' score.

The test results also highlight an achievement gap between male and female students, and among students of different races. Boys scored significantly higher for all three grades. In general, white students scored higher than all other ethnicities, except for grade 12, where white and Asian/Pacific Islander students scored equally well. Additionally, the average score for northern states tended to be higher than the national average, whereas the average score for southern states tended to be lower than the national average. New Hampshire and Montana topped the state rankings; Mississippi ranked last.

The assessment is administered by the National Center for Education Statistics, a part of the Department of Education. The test measures students' knowledge and abilities in physical, life, earth, and space sciences. Students' scores are classified into three groups: basic, proficient, and advanced. Because of changes to the 2009 test, the most recent results cannot be compared with previous assessments.

To read the report, visit http://nationsreportcard.gov/science_2009/.

New Student Campaign for Science, Science Education Launched, Act Now

Over the past few weeks, student members of the Botanical Society of America have worked with the AIBS Public Policy Office to craft an open letter explaining to lawmakers why continued investments in scientific research and training programs are essential to their future career development. This grassroots effort is now becoming a national campaign. As part of this effort, AIBS has created a webpage that allows undergraduate and graduate students to sign an open letter to lawmakers.

The letter encourages "Congress and the President to make sustained investments in the nation's scientific research, education, and training programs. The extramural, competitive, peer-

reviewed grant programs administered by federal agencies are critical to our nation's scientific enterprise and future.”

If you are a student who is pursuing a Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctoral degree in a scientific field, please take action. The letter and sign-on page are available at <http://www.aibs.org/public-policy/sciencestudentsletter.html>.

Recent Articles on the Dwindling Supply of Taxonomists

Two articles published this month highlight the lack of taxonomists worldwide. The January 2011 issue of the journal *BioScience* includes an article entitled “Recovery Plan for the Endangered Taxonomy Profession.” The article, which appears in the journal's Professional Biologist column, proposes emphasizing the training of non-professional taxonomists, including parataxonomists, amateurs, and youths, to reverse the declining trend in professionals entering the field. The article is available with a subscription at <http://www.jstor.org/pss/10.1525/bio.2011.61.1.11>.

On 19 January, Wired.com published an article entitled “The Mass Extinction of Scientists Who Study Species” that takes a look at the impact of the declining number of professional taxonomists. This loss of expertise could have profound impacts on our collective scientific knowledge: “The problem we face is a loss of knowledge not yet recorded in the scientific literature. In our technological efforts to concentrate our biodiversity knowledge, we may be rendering a field and body of knowledge obsolete. And in the process, we may be undermining our own efforts to protect biodiversity.” The article can be read for free at <http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2011/01/extinction-of-taxonomists/>.

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.