

NSC Alliance Washington Report, Volume 1, Issue 4, March 23, 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.

NSC Alliance Asks Congress to Include Collections in Legislation

On 15 March 2010, NSC Alliance sent a letter to House Research and Science Education Subcommittee Chairman Daniel Lipinski (D-IL) asking that his Subcommittee include natural science collections in the reauthorization of the America COMPETES Act. Specifically, the letter asked that the House adapt the language and policy objectives of the NSC Alliance proposed Presidential Executive Order for the Preservation and Use of Science Collections. The NSC Alliance launched a campaign in 2009 to ask the President to establish a federal infrastructure that would identify and prioritize the needs of federal and non-federal science collections.

To learn more about the proposed order, please visit <http://nscalliance.org/?p=139>

To read the NSC Alliance letter to Chairman Lipinski, please go to <http://nscalliance.org/?p=260>.

NSC Alliance member organizations are encouraged to send a letter to Chairman Lipinski. Indications are that the House Science Committee would like to have the final House vote on the reauthorization of America COMPETES by May. Thus, letters should be sent to Subcommittee Chairman Lipinski as soon as possible.

New Rule Regarding Culturally Unidentifiable Native American Human Remains

The Department of the Interior has finalized a rule regarding procedures for the disposition of culturally unidentifiable Native American human remains in the possession or control of museums or federal agencies. The rule implements the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

According to the notice published in the Federal Register:

“In brief, this rule pertains to those human remains, in collections, determined by museums and Federal agencies to be Native American, but for whom no relationship of shared group identity can be reasonably traced, historically or prehistorically, between a present day Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization and an identifiable earlier group. These individuals are listed on inventories as culturally unidentifiable Native American human remains. The rule requires consultation on the culturally unidentifiable human remains by the museum or Federal agency with Indian tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations whose tribal lands or aboriginal occupancy areas are in the area where the remains were removed. If cultural affiliation still cannot be determined and repatriation achieved, then the Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization may request disposition of the remains. The museum or Federal agency would then publish a notice and transfer control to the tribe, without first being required to appear before the Review Committee to seek a recommendation for disposition approval from the Secretary of the Interior. Disposition requests, which do not meet the parameters of the rule, would still require approval from the Secretary, who may request a recommendation from the Review Committee.”

The rule will go into effect on May 14 2010. Until that time, comments being accepted. For more information, please visit <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2010/2010-5283.htm>.

REMINDER: Comments Sought on Strategic Plan to Digitize Biological Collection

A strategic plan is being developed for a 10-year, national effort to digitize and mobilize images and data associated with biological research collections. The plan aims to create a publicly available, comprehensive collections resource that will increase access to biological collections across the country. The plan was drafted by workshop participants at the National Evolutionary Synthesis Center in February 2010.

The strategic plan is seen as "a grand challenge" and will be undertaken "as a unified mission involving a coordinated funding program and well designed strategy for execution." The plan calls for the development of cyberinfrastructure "to promote efficient and standard capture and mobilization of these data to make the national biological collections resource publicly available for analysis."

The plan has several goals for the digitization effort:

- Making images and data from all U.S. biological collections available in an integrated, web accessible interface using shared standards and formats.
- Developing and launching new web interfaces, visualization and analysis tools, data mining, image analysis, and geo-referencing processes.

- Digitizing and web mobilizing the existing backlog of non-digitized collections, and developing tools, training, and infrastructure to prevent the reoccurrence of such a backlog.

These goals would be accomplished by a three tiered approach.

1. Develop a coordinated effort to provide technological support for the nationwide collections digitization effort, to organize new efforts with existing collections-based projects and international efforts, and to disseminate standards, techniques and best practices.
2. Develop a network of regional collaborations for collection digitization across the United States.
3. Develop investigator-driven and cross-regional collaborations driven by the specific needs of collections of a particular clade or preservation type, or motivated by a particular scientific question to be addressed by the use of collections images and data.

Feedback on the strategic plan from the collections community is sought and can be made on the plan's website (<http://digbiocol.wordpress.com/>) or by sending an email to wg-digitization@nescent.org. Group feedback based on institutional priorities or taxon-based needs is welcomed. Specific feedback is needed in areas such as support for the proposed model, suggestions for revision, ideas regarding the three-tiered approach, priorities for collection digitization, and ways to maximize collaboration across institutions and federal agencies, and at the international level. This feedback will be aggregated and provided to participants in future planning sessions that will develop a final strategic plan.

USFWS Seeks Input on Permits

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is soliciting public comment on permitting process associated with research on species protected under the Endangered Species Act. FWS Form 3-200-55 regulates research, enhancement of propagation or survival, and interstate commerce of endangered and threatened species. Comments on ways to enhance the permit and to reduce the burden on applicants will be accepted until 10 May 2010. Please see <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2010/2010-5030.htm> for more information.

NSF BIO Program Launches Online Science Partnerships Tool

The National Science Foundation (NSF) Division of Integrative Organismal Systems has launched a Wiki to facilitate partnerships between researchers and end-users of science. "NSF intends to use a Wiki, a social networking vehicle, to facilitate and increase the number of collaborations between end-users and investigators who develop tools and resources, and to promote downstream dissemination and development of outcomes," according to Joann Roskoski, acting assistant director of the Biological Sciences Directorate. For more information, please visit http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2010/nsf10028/nsf10028.jsp?WT.mc_id=USNSF_179. To sign-up for the Wiki, visit <https://extwiki.nsf.gov/signup.action>.

NRC Calls for Exploration of Connections Between Climate and Human Evolution

A new report by the National Research Council (NRC), “Understanding Climate’s Influence on Human Evolution,” considers the research needed to answer fundamental questions about impacts of Earth’s climate on human origins. “Significant progress into the question of whether past climate changes influenced human evolution will require a coordinated, focused, and cross-disciplinary research program designed specifically to address this problem,” the report states. Specially, the NRC calls for two research initiatives over a 10-20 year period. The first theme would study the impacts of climate change and climate variability on human evolution and dispersal. Secondly, climate modeling, environmental records, and biotic responses would be integrated. To accomplish these goals, the report calls for a major exploration initiative to locate new fossils sites, and an integrated effort to better understand climate history where hominins evolved by sampling lake and ocean sediments and a major investment in climate modeling. To read the report, please visit <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/12825.html>.

Education Policy Debates Underway

The Obama Administration has released its plans for reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (more recently referred to as “No Child Left Behind”). According to Department of Education documents, the Administration’s plan will “help states raise expectations of students and reward schools for producing dramatic gains in student achievement. The blueprint provides incentives for states to adopt academic standards that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and create accountability systems that measure student growth toward meeting the goal that all children graduate and succeed in college.”

Additionally, on 10 March 2010, the influential National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) released the first “official public draft of the K-12 standards” as part of the “Common Core State Standards Initiative,” a process being led by members of the two organizations from the states, territories, and the District of Columbia.

According to an NGA news release, “These draft standards, developed together with teachers, school administrators and experts, seek to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare our children for college and the workforce. The NGA Center and CCSSO have received feedback from national organizations representing, but not limited to teachers, postsecondary education (including community colleges), civil rights groups, English language learners, and students with disabilities. The NGA Center and CCSSO encourage those interested in the standards to provide further feedback by Friday, April 2, 2010, at www.corestandards.org.

These standards define the knowledge and skills students should have within their K-12 education careers so that they will graduate high school able to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses and in workforce training programs. The standards are:

- Aligned with college and work expectations;

- Clear, understandable and consistent;
- Include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills;
- Build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards;
- Informed by other top performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society; and
- Evidence- and research-based.

The standards are expected to be finalized in early spring. For more information, visit www.corestandards.org.

For more information about the Department of Education's framework for reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, please go to <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/>.

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.