

## **NSC Alliance Washington Report, Volume 3, Issue 6, May 2, 2012**

In this Issue:

- NSC Alliance Congressional Briefing on Digitization Nears, Plan to Attend
  - Reminder: NSC Alliance Board Meeting to Be Held in June
  - Congressional Panels Approve Increases for NSF
  - NSC Alliance Recent Accomplishments
  - United Nations Forms New Entity to Study, Preserve Biodiversity
  - NSF Awards Second Round of Digitization Grants
  - NSC Alliance Asks Senate to Support Proposed Funding for Interior Collections
  - Biologists Honor Representatives Fattah, Wolf
  - Changes Proposed to NAGPRA Regulations
  - Museums Participate in MayDay, Prepare for Emergencies
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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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### **NSC Alliance Congressional Briefing on Digitization Nears, Plan to Attend**

On Tuesday, 5 June 2012, the Natural Science Collections Alliance will sponsor a science briefing for congressional lawmakers in Washington, DC. The briefing, which will take place in room 2325 of the Rayburn House Office Building from 2:00-3:00 p.m., will provide policymakers with information about how digitization of specimens and associated data are increasing access to natural science collections for research, education, and other societal benefits.

All interested individuals are welcome to attend this public event.

Program speakers:

- Dr. Mary Liz Jameson, Associate Professor, Wichita State University  
“The Value of Biological Collections to Science, Education, and the Economy”
- Dr. Larry Page, President, Natural Science Collections Alliance, Curator of Fishes, Florida Museum of Natural History  
“Digitization: A Modern Method for Exponentially Increasing Access to Collections”
- Dr. Michael A. Mares, Director, Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History and Professor of Zoology, University of Oklahoma  
“Securing the Long-term Sustainability of Natural Science Collections and Data”

## **Reminder: NSC Alliance Board Meeting to Be Held in June**

The NSC Alliance Board of Directors will meet in Washington, DC on 4 June 2012. The meeting will be held from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm at the American Institute of Biological Sciences Public Policy Office (1444 I Street, NW, Suite 200). McPherson Square Metro station is located ½ block away. Parking is available at several nearby garages.

## **Congressional Panels Approve Increases for NSF**

The National Science Foundation (NSF) could receive \$7.3 billion next year if legislation approved by the House and Senate Appropriations Committees is enacted. The proposals were approved with bipartisan support in late April.

A bill (S. 2323) endorsed by Senate appropriators would increase funding for NSF by \$240 million, a 3.4 percent increase over the current spending level. The House Appropriations Committee approved a proposal that would increase funding for NSF by \$59 million more than the level proposed by the Senate.

Both versions of the legislation would direct new funding to NSF's research directorates, which would receive a 4.5 percent increase under the House bill and a 3.4 percent bump under the Senate plan. Education funding would increase by 5.6 percent. The Major Research Equipment and Facilities Construction account would remain essentially flat at the fiscal year 2012 level. Funding for agency operations and grant administration would also remain flat. Although the \$7.3 billion proposed for NSF is less than President Obama requested, the mark is notable because other agencies and programs are facing the prospect of budget cuts under the House and Senate spending plans.

Of note, even if enacted into law, the actual funding available to the agency in the next fiscal year could be reduced next year if Congress and the President fail to reach a comprehensive budget deal that would stop the automatic budget sequestration that is scheduled to begin in January 2013.

## **NSC Alliance Recent Accomplishments**

Periodically, Natural Science Collections Alliance (NSC Alliance) member institutions request information about what the NSC Alliance has recently accomplished. The following provides a summary of some of the key activities and accomplishments of the NSC Alliance for the period of January 2011 to April 2012.

- Worked with other scientific organizations to demonstrate grassroots support for increased funding for the National Science Foundation. This effort resulted in increased fiscal year 2012 funding for the National Science Foundation.

- Coordinated a joint society letter to the National Science Foundation to express concerns with a proposal to alter the Collections in Support of Biological Research program.
- Provided testimony to House and Senate Appropriations Committees in support for increased funding for the National Science Foundation and the Department of the Interior.
- Sponsored the 2011 Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits event.
- Nominated, successfully, an individual for service on the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Advisory Committee.
- Participated in the USGS Coalition, an alliance of more than 70 organizations dedicated to the continued vitality of the USGS and its programs.
- Provided regular policy and news updates to NSC Alliance members via the NSC Alliance Washington Report.
- Developed a series of issue briefs that help to articulate the importance of scientific collections.

Additionally, the organization is currently planning a science briefing for members of Congress. The briefing on digitization of biological collections will take place in the Rayburn House Office building in Washington, DC, on 5 June 2012. NSC Alliance members are encouraged to attend this briefing (see <http://nscalliance.org/?p=462>).

### **United Nations Forms New Entity to Study, Preserve Biodiversity**

After several years of negotiations, the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) was formally established. The new independent body will be hosted in Bonn, Germany.

IPBES aims to address the accelerating loss of biodiversity and degradation of ecosystem services around the globe by bridging the gap between accurate, impartial science and policymakers.

“Today, biodiversity won,” said Sir Robert Watson, Chief Scientific Advisor of the United Kingdom’s Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs in a statement on 23 April. “Over 90 governments successfully established the science-policy interface for all countries. Biodiversity and ecosystem services are essential for human wellbeing. This platform will generate the knowledge and build the capacity to protect them for this and future generations.”

IPBES will provide four core functions: 1) identify and prioritize key scientific information needed for policymakers and catalyze efforts to generate new knowledge; 2) perform regular and timely assessments of knowledge on biodiversity and ecosystem services; 3) support policy formulation and implementation by identifying policy-relevant tools and methodologies; and 4) prioritize key capacity-building needs to improve the science-policy interface.

IPBES is “critically important to support implementation of the new Strategic Plan of the Convention on Biological Diversity and to promote global sustainable development,” stated Helen Clark, administrator of the United Nations Development Programme. “We believe that

IPBES can help ensure that developing countries and communities have access to sound scientific information to inform development policies, protecting biodiversity and ecosystem services in a way that addresses poverty alleviation and promotes growth with equity.”

### **NSF Awards Second Round of Digitization Grants**

The National Science Foundation (NSF) has awarded six new grants as part of the Advancing Digitization of Biological Collections program. The program aims to increase accessibility of biological collections and associated data. The latest round of funding will support four major grants and two smaller projects.

According to a press release by NSF, the new awards will increase the diversity of organisms to be digitized and enhance the development of techniques to digitize specimens.

“The collections being digitized are unprecedented in their worth to research and education, and hold huge potential for future development and integration with other biological data from genomes to phenomes,” said Dr. John Wingfield, NSF assistant director for Biological Sciences. “With the diversity of information digitized, these projects are addressing issues of interoperability, access and analysis--'big data.' The benefits will be felt for many generations to come.”

Four new Thematic Collections Networks (TCNs) will be funded. Last year, NSF announced funding for the first three TCNs, as well as for a national entity. The new TCNs are:

- Mobilizing New England Vascular Plant Specimen Data to Track Environmental Changes
- Digitizing Fossils to Enable New Syntheses in Biogeography - Creating a PALEONICHES-TCN
- The Macrofungi Collection Consortium: Unlocking a Biodiversity Resource for Understanding Biotic Interactions, Nutrient Cycling and Human Affairs
- Southwest Collections of Arthropods Network (SCAN): A Model for Collections Digitization to Promote Taxonomic and Ecological Research

Additionally, two new Partners to Existing Networks were announced. These smaller grants will enhance existing TCNs by adding their collections to fill gaps identified in the original network proposals. The new partner awards will focus on digitization of subtropical bryophytes and lichens, as well as high altitude lichens.

### **NSC Alliance Asks Senate to Support Proposed Funding for Interior Collections**

On 24 April 2012, the NSC Alliance submitted testimony to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. The NSC Alliance statement encouraged Congress to support \$3.5 million in new funding for the Department of the Interior’s Cultural and Scientific Collections program.

The FY 2013 budget request would implement a multi-year action plan to address recommendations made by the Department's Inspector General regarding Interior's accountability for its cultural and scientific specimens. Interior is an important caretaker of museum collections; the Department has an estimated 146 million items, which is second in size only to the Smithsonian Institution.

Read NSC Alliance's testimony at [http://nscalliance.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/nsca\\_fy13\\_interior\\_testimony\\_senate.pdf](http://nscalliance.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/nsca_fy13_interior_testimony_senate.pdf).

### **Biologists Honor Representatives Fattah, Wolf**

Representatives Chaka Fattah (D-PA) and Frank Wolf (R-VA) are the recipients of the 2012 Biological and Ecological Sciences Coalition (BESC) Award. The honor is given to congressional leaders who have demonstrated a commitment to advancing science policy and research.

“Our community of biological scientists greatly appreciates the years of leadership by Representatives Wolf and Fattah in advocating for the research dollars needed to address national challenges, help our nation to remain globally competitive, and equip our young people for the science and technology jobs of the future,” said Nadine Lymn, co-chair of BESC and director of public affairs for the Ecological Society of America.

Representatives Wolf and Fattah have led the effort in recent years to sustain federal investments in critical research programs. Representative Wolf, a Republican representing the 10th district of Virginia, chairs the House of Representatives Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies. Representative Fattah, a Democrat from the 2nd district of Pennsylvania, is the senior Democrat on the subcommittee. Last year, they worked together to press for and secure federal support for the National Science Foundation and other science agencies.

Representative Wolf was among the members of Congress that called for the National Academies to make recommendations to Congress about how the United States could regain its global leadership in science-driven innovation and competitiveness. This effort led to the publication of the “Rising Above the Gathering Storm” report, which sparked a national effort to strengthen U.S. research and education programs. The Congressman is also responsible for the generation of a recent report by the National Science Foundation on best practices in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education. In the 110th session of Congress, Wolf sponsored a bill that would have attracted more students to pursue careers in science and engineering.

Representative Fattah is a strong supporter of neuroscience research. Last year, he successfully led the effort for the creation of an interagency working group to coordinate federal investments in neuroscience research. The Congressman is also very supportive of STEM education. Last year, he co-organized an event in Philadelphia for the rollout of the National Science Foundation

report on best practices in STEM education. Representative Fattah also has worked to increase minority participation in STEM fields.

“Chairman Wolf and Ranking Member Fattah have been powerful and steadfast advocates for scientific research, particularly at the National Science Foundation,” said BESC co-chair Robert Gropp, director of public policy at the American Institute of Biological Sciences. “They both appreciate that research drives innovation, informs solutions for global problems, and will contribute significantly to our nation’s economic recovery.”

The Natural Science Collections Alliance is a member of the Biological and Ecological Sciences Coalition (BESC), an alliance of organizations united by a concern for every aspect of the biology of the natural world, from agricultural systems to zoology. BESC supports the goal of increasing the nation’s investment in the non-medical biological sciences across all federal agencies including the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Geological Survey, the Department of Energy, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Please visit [www.esa.org/besc](http://www.esa.org/besc).

### **Changes Proposed to NAGPRA Regulations**

The Department of the Interior is proposing several changes to the regulations that implement the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). The proposed changes would correct minor inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the regulation.

One example of a proposed revision is adding known lineal descendants to the list of parties who are to be notified of an inadvertent discovery of Native American human remains, funerary objects, or sacred objects on federal land. Another revision would clarify the exceptions to the requirements for repatriation.

More information is available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-04-18/html/2012-9228.htm>. Comments on the proposed changes will be accepted through 18 June 2012.

### **Museums Participate in MayDay, Prepare for Emergencies**

Cultural institutions are invited to plan for emergencies and enter for a chance to win disaster preparedness supplies. Museums, archives, and libraries are holding fire safety drills, updating disaster plans, and mapping emergency routes as part of the annual MayDay event.

Organizations are encouraged to submit their plans to Heritage Preservation by 31 May 2012 for the chance to win a prize package that includes a collections protection kit, leak alert water detectors, and more. Enter the drawing at <http://fd7.formdesk.com/heritagepreservation/MayDay2012>.

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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.org](http://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](mailto:spotter@aibs.org).