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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 Calls for Government Review of Costs of New Federal Collections

On 22 June 2012, the NSC Alliance wrote to President Obama's senior advisers on budget and science regarding the establishment of new federal scientific collections.

The letter from NSC Alliance President Dr. Larry Page thanks the Administration for its actions to encourage federal agencies to identify and more adequately budget for federally owned scientific collections. The letter points out, however, that federal personnel are sometimes unaware of specimens or data housed in non-federal institutions. This oversight can result in the establishment of a new collection when one or more already exists at a nearby non-federal facility.

“In the interest of improved stewardship of taxpayer resources and increased government efficiency, we respectfully request that you direct federal agencies to conduct a cost-benefit analysis prior to establishing a new federal collection,” states the letters. “We suggest that no new federal scientific collection be established unless it has been determined that funding an existing non-federal collection to curate the specimens will not be more cost-effective.”

The letter was sent to Dr. John Holdren, Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy and Assistant to the President for Science and Technology, and Mr. Jeffrey Zients, Acting Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Read the letters at <http://nscalliance.org/?p=549>.

Showcase Science to Policymakers This August

This August, the NSC Alliance is sponsoring the 4th *Annual Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits* event. This national initiative encourages members of the science community to meet with their elected officials. Unlike other efforts to educate members of Congress about the importance of scientific research and education programs, this event occurs across the country – not in Washington, DC.

As part of *Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits*, scientists and representatives of research facilities will meet with their members of Congress to describe how science is conducted and why a sustained investment in research and education programs must be a national priority. Participating scientists will meet with their elected officials at a district office or may invite them to visit a research laboratory, field site, or natural history collection.

Participants will receive information about federal funding for biological and environmental research, tools for improving their communication skills, and tips for conducting a successful meeting with an elected official. Participating scientists will receive guidance and some assistance with scheduling meetings.

Participation is free, but registration will close on 15 July 2012. For more information and to register, visit http://www.aibs.org/public-policy/congressional_district_visits.html.

Curators Suspicious of Specimen Loan Requests

Curators are growing suspicious of specimen requests from a museum in India. According to an article published in *Science Insider*, natural history repositories all over the world have been plagued by e-mail requests from the Life Science Museum in Jhansi, India, which claim that the director needs assistance replacing specimens lost to unexpected disaster.

Andrew Bentley, a scientist and museum curator who manages the fish collections at the University of Kansas Biodiversity Institute in Lawrence, received such a specimen request from the Life Science Museum. After donating 36 surplus specimens, he tried to contact the museum but his attempts quickly proved futile. Bentley was unable to verify any information about the Life Science Museum or the alleged director Mohammad Haq.

Like Bentley, natural history collections around the world have reported receiving similar e-mails requests, from senders identifying themselves as Haq or Sheikh Taufique Rehmani. Curators state that these emails specify species and sizes which are frequently used in schools and training programs. Specimens like hagfish, lampreys, and ratfish, all of which are extremely valuable, have been requested by the mystery museum, which raises concern that contributions could be used for profit.

The legitimacy of neither the e-mails nor the institution has been confirmed, according to *Science Insider*, but some speculate that the e-mail requests are no more than a clever scam.

Stay Informed about Digitization: Subscribe to the iDigBio Newsletter

Stay informed about the Integrated Digitized Biocollections (iDigBio) project by starting a free subscription to its monthly eNewsletter. Subscribers receive information about upcoming workshops on collection digitization, information about digitization protocols, and more.

iDigBio is funded by the National Science Foundation and is focused on three key objectives:

- Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of biodiversity digitization;
- Provide a collaboration platform to share information about digitization within the collections community and beyond; and
- Create tools and a web portal to enable the integration of specimen data, images, and other important attributes of U.S. museum specimens - from all taxa - in one central source for research and public access.

Start your free subscription by visiting <http://idigbio.us4.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=5c564b4cf1e8157b450723e1c&id=52d4c78f87>.

Researchers Digitize Ant Specimens in 3D

A team of scientists is trying to capture 3D images of every species of ant in the world. They are using a new technique that allows the tiny anatomy of ants to be photographed. The images will be posted online for use by other researchers, students, and the public.

So far, about more than 8,300 species have been photographed. The images were made of 18,500 specimens in natural history collections.

Dr. Brian Fisher of the California Academy of Sciences is leading the effort. Dr. Fisher told BBC Nature that they plan on imaging 10,000 specimens a year. The team of researchers will visit museums around the world and systematically work their way through every box of ant specimens until the entire collection has been photographed.

The photography technique employed by the team takes dozens of pictures of each specimen, with each photograph in a different plane of focus. The images are then combined into one picture that displays all of the details of the specimen.

“You can zoom in and see fine hairs, the eyes, all of this detail,” Dr Fisher explains. “And all of this, under a microscope, is not in focus.

Learn more about the initiative at <http://www.antweb.org/>.

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.