

## **NSC Alliance Washington Report, Volume 2, Issue 7, June 27, 2011**

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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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### **Senate Panel Evaluates Federal Agency Progress on NAGPRA Implementation**

On 16 June, the Senate Indian Affairs Committee held an oversight hearing on the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). Committee Chairman Daniel Akaka (D-HI), who is of Native Hawaiian ancestry, presided over the hearing. “When my people think about those 'iwi kupuna-those ancestors-whose bones are subjected to scientific scrutiny, display, or cataloged storage, there is a sense of outrage and sorrow over the failure to care for the bones as our tradition requires,” said Senator Akaka.

Witnesses representing several branches of the federal government testified about the progress agencies have made in repatriating Native American human remains and funerary objects. Despite progress, federal agencies do not yet fully comply with NAGPRA, according to a representative of the Government Accountability Office (GAO). Agencies have worked for more than 20 years to repatriate human remains and funerary objects, but still not all items have been repatriated. Only a few agencies have high confidence that they have properly identified items in their care. GAO found that the United States Forest Service, Army Corps of Engineers, and National Park Service are doing the best job with NAGPRA compliance.

Three witnesses representing Native American tribes spoke about the need for better agency and museum compliance and an improved consultation process. One central issue is the policy for

disposition of culturally unidentifiable remains. One of the witnesses felt that museums create unfair burdens of proof for repatriation of culturally unidentifiable remains--standards that are higher than those set by NAGPRA. Another witness felt that the regulation for disposition of culturally unidentifiable remains was so flawed that it should be repealed. It was also pointed out that this regulation does not apply to funerary objects, only human remains. Some witnesses were troubled that the Act does not include human remains dating to prior to 1776 as Native American. The tribes would also like their oral tradition to have equal weight to science during the repatriation process.

The hearing record will be open until 30 June for written comments. To watch a webcast of the hearing or read the witnesses' testimony, visit <http://indian.senate.gov/hearings/hearing.cfm?hearingID=e655f9e2809e5476862f735da19bb425>.

### **NSF Seeks Input on Merit Review Criteria**

The National Science Board (NSB) has reviewed the National Science Foundation's (NSF) merit review criteria and is proposing revisions. After evaluating comments from over 5,100 individuals, the NSB believes that the existing two review criteria, Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts, are "in fact the right criteria for evaluating NSF proposals, but that revisions are needed to clarify the intent of the criteria, and to highlight the connection to NSF's core principles," stated NSB Chairman Ray Bowen and NSF Director Subra Suresh in a Dear Colleague letter.

Only a few words in the revised Intellectual Merit criteria were changed from the existing criteria. Conversely, the proposed Broader Impacts criteria have been completely rewritten. The new criteria consider the national goals the proposal addresses, instead of considering how the activity advances discovery while promoting education or enhances infrastructure for research and education. Additionally, new criteria have been added regarding the qualifications of the applicant and the resources available to him/her.

NSF is collecting comments through 14 July at [meritreview@nsf.gov](mailto:meritreview@nsf.gov). More information is available at [http://www.nsf.gov/nsb/publications/2011/06\\_mrtf.jsp](http://www.nsf.gov/nsb/publications/2011/06_mrtf.jsp).

### **House Passes FY 2012 Agriculture Appropriations, Advances Energy Funding Bill**

On 16 June, the House of Representatives passed its fiscal year (FY) 2012 spending plan for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The bill, HR 2112, would cut the department's discretionary funding by 13 percent relative to FY 2011. The measure passed by a narrow margin of fourteen votes. All House Democrats and 19 Republicans opposed the measure.

Among the programs targeted for funding reductions are the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). The legislation would cut the budget for ARS, the USDA's in-house research division, by 12 percent relative to FY 2011. Among the proposed budget cuts are the closure of ten ARS research facilities, an action supported by the Obama Administration. Funding for competitive, extramural research within

NIFA would decrease by 13 percent, well below the 22 percent increase requested by the Obama Administration.

According to Appropriations Committee report language accompanying the legislation: “While the bill reduces funding for the agencies and programs under its jurisdiction, it provides sufficient funding for them to focus on their core missions.” In terms of science, the report states that the budget is adequate for core science missions, such as “ensuring that agricultural research is science-based and focused on keeping American agriculture competitive...”

The Appropriations Committee report cited concern regarding NIFA’s research priorities. The Committee “is concerned about some of the research being funded by the agency. For example, the agency recently awarded more than \$23 million in grants to improve regional and local food systems.... In light of ... the nation’s serious budget deficit and debt problems, the agency should be focusing its research efforts on only the highest priority, scientifically merited research.”

During floor debate over the legislation, the House considered numerous amendments. One amendment that was adopted would halt USDA’s climate adaptation planning. The policy, which was sponsored by Representative Steve Scalise (R-LA), would prevent USDA from using funds appropriated by the FY 2012 bill to implement a new departmental regulation that calls for assessing how climate change may affect agriculture systems and the department’s operations. Additionally, Reps. Lynn Woolsey (D-CA) and Don Young (R-AK) successfully offered an amendment to bar the Food and Drug Administration from spending money in FY 2012 to consider the approval of genetically engineered salmon.

The House Appropriations Committee also advanced legislation to fund the Department of Energy in FY 2012. The Committee approved a bill on 15 June to fund the Office of Science at \$4.8 billion, a \$43 million decrease. The Biological and Environmental Research (BER) program would receive \$547.1 million, \$64.7 million less than last year and \$170.8 million less than President Obama requested.

The Appropriations Committee would like some of those reductions to come from the Climate and Environmental Sciences program within BER. “[C]limate research at the Department of Energy is closely related to activities carried out in other federal agencies and may be better carried out by those organizations. The Department proposes to eliminate medical research focused on human applications in order to direct limited funds to on-mission purposes, and the Department should apply the same principles to climate and atmospheric research.”

### **NOAA Releases Draft Scientific Integrity Policy**

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has proposed a new policy to protect NOAA scientists from political interference. NOAA’s draft policy follows the recent adoption of a scientific integrity policy by the Department of the Interior.

“NOAA is dedicated to preserving the integrity of the scientific activities it conducts, and activities that are conducted on its behalf,” states the draft policy. “It will not tolerate loss of integrity in the performance of scientific activities or in the application of science in decision-making.”

In order to accomplish these goals, NOAA will facilitate the free flow of scientific information; document the scientific knowledge considered in decision making and where feasible use information that has been independently peer review; base hiring decisions for scientific positions on the candidate’s integrity, experience, and credentials; and examine, track, and resolve allegations of scientific misconduct.

The proposed policy applies to all employees, political appointees, and contractors who engage in, supervise, or manage scientific activities, publicly communicate science, or use scientific information in decision making. The policy includes codes of conduct for scientists and for supervisors and managers.

The policy allows NOAA scientists to speak to the media and the public about scientific and technical matters. It encourages NOAA scientists to publish and disseminate scientific findings and data, including through peer-reviewed journals. They are also encouraged to present their research at scientific meetings, serve on editorial boards and expert review panels, and participate and serve in leadership capacities within professional societies.

NOAA is accepting public comments on the draft policy through 15 August 2011. For more information, visit <http://www.noaa.gov/scientificintegrity>.

### **Deadline Approaching to Comment on NAGPRA Review**

The Department of the Interior is currently leading a discretionary review of the current Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) regulations. The purpose of the review is to address two questions: (1) Based on 15 years of use, do the rules currently codified at 43 C.F.R. Part 10 need any amendments, such as corrections, clarifications, or refinements?; and (2) If the answer is ‘yes,’ then how should the rules be amended?

The deadline to submit comments is 1 July 2011. Comments should be sent to David Tarler at [david\\_tarler@nps.gov](mailto:david_tarler@nps.gov).

### **Don’t Wait Until Its Too Late: Tell Congress about the Importance of Natural History Museums**

Congress has begun to consider federal appropriations for fiscal year 2012. It is expected that this year’s funding debates will be as robust and contentious as they were this year. So, it is important to let lawmakers know now how important federal investments in natural history museums are, particularly with respect to scientific research and education.

Please take a few minutes to send a letter to your members of Congress or to the editor of local

news outlets. Prepared letters may be sent from the Legislative Action Center at <http://capwiz.com/aibs/home/>. If you have a few extra minutes, you may customize the sample letter to increase its effectiveness.

### **NSC Alliance Sponsors Congressional Visits: Showcase Science to Policymakers This August**

NSC Alliance is proud to announce that it is a Sponsor of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits event.

This national initiative is an opportunity for scientists across the country to meet with their members of Congress to showcase the people, facilities, and equipment that are required to support and conduct scientific research.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits event will be held throughout the month of August 2011, when Representatives and Senators spend time in their Congressional districts and home states. This event is an opportunity for scientists, graduate students, representatives of research facilities, and people affiliated with scientific collections to meet with their members of Congress without traveling to Washington, DC. Participants may either invite their elected officials to visit their facility or can meet with the policymaker at the local congressional office.

Participants will be prepared for their congressional meetings through an interactive training webinar. Individuals participating in this event will receive information about federal funding for biological research, tools for improving their communication skills, and tips for conducting a successful meeting with an elected official.

Participation is free, but registration will close on 15 July 2011. For more information and to register, visit [http://www.aibs.org/public-policy/congressional\\_district\\_visits.html](http://www.aibs.org/public-policy/congressional_district_visits.html).

### **Enter the Faces of Biology Photo Contest**

Biological research takes diverse forms—from field research to computer modeling to lab work. Help the public and policymakers to better understand the breadth of biology by entering the Faces of Biology Photo Contest. The contest is sponsored by the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS).

The contest is an opportunity to showcase the varied forms that biological research can take. Photographs entered into the contest must depict a person, such as a scientist, researcher, technician, or student, engaging in biological research. The depicted research may occur outside, in a lab, with a natural history collection, on a computer, in a classroom, or elsewhere.

The Grand Prize Winner will have his/her winning photo featured on the cover of *BioScience*, and will receive \$250 and a one year membership in AIBS, including a print subscription to

*BioScience*. The First and Second Place Winners will have his/her winning photo printed inside *BioScience*, and will receive a one year membership in AIBS, including a print subscription to *BioScience*.

The contest ends on 30 September 2011 at 11:59:59 pm Eastern Time.

For more information and to enter the contest, visit <http://www.aibs.org/public-programs/photocontest.html>.

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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).