

NSC Alliance Washington Report, Volume 2, Issue 6, June 8, 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.

House Begins Work on FY 2012 Appropriations

After a slow start, the House of Representatives Appropriations Committee has begun its consideration of fiscal year (FY) 2012 appropriations. The Committee set an ambitious agenda for crafting the 12 bills that would collectively fund the federal government in the upcoming fiscal year, which starts on 1 October 2011. The Committee plans to consider at least 9 of the bills on the House floor before the start of the Congressional recess in August. As of today, the House has passed one appropriations bill.

Among the bills that the Appropriations Committee has considered to date are legislation to fund the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Department of Energy (DOE). The Committee passed a bill on 31 May that would cut funding for the USDA in FY 2012. That legislation would cut the budget for the Agricultural Research Service, the USDA's in-house research division, by nearly \$140 million relative to FY 2011. Funding for competitive,

extramural research would decrease by 15 percent to \$225 million, well below the \$325 million requested by the Obama Administration. The Committee recommended a budget of \$4.8 billion (-\$42.7 million) for the Department of Energy Office of Science. It is not yet clear what the funding levels will be for the biological and environmental research divisions at DOE.

Also of note is a policy rider included in the House-passed version of the FY 2012 appropriations bill for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The House voted 242 to 180 to adopt an amendment offered by Representative John Carter (R-TX) that would bar DHS from participating in the Interagency Task Force on Climate Change Adaptation. The Task Force, which is comprised of representatives from the White House, 12 departments, and 5 independent agencies, is tasked with developing recommendations for preparing the United States for the impacts of climate change. In his statement supporting the amendment, Carter said that DHS should focus its limited resources on securing the U.S.-Mexico border, “not wasting time duplicating the work of the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.”

The House Appropriations Committee is expected to take up consideration of funding bills for the National Science Foundation, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Environmental Protection Agency, and Department of the Interior in early July. The Senate has yet to publically release drafts of any FY 2012 appropriation bills.

Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative Announces Availability of New Funding

The Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative Research Board announced on 7 June 2011 that up to \$1.5 million in grants will be available to provide funds for the acquisition of samples and critical observations of effects of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. The Request for Proposals (RFP-III) will support sampling during 1 July to 30 September 2011.

The RFP-III addresses the urgent need to provide stop-gap or emergency funding to continue observations and sampling and/or to initiate new observations and sampling during the summer months.

Accelerated proposal submission, review, and grant allocation will be employed for RFP-III. No letter of intent is required from potential grant applicants. The deadline to submit a proposal for RFP-III is 17 June 2011 at 9:00 pm EDT. Awards will be announced on 30 June 2011.

RFP-III is open to all academic and research institutions, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and Federally Funded Research and Development Centers.

Awards will be made in a competitive review of proposals submitted.

The GRI Research Board is an independent body established by BP and the Gulf of Mexico Alliance (GOMA) to oversee BP’s \$500 million commitment to fund independent research on the effects of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Detailed information about RFP-III, including grant application requirements and procedures, is available on the GRI Research Board web site at <http://griresearchboard.org/rfp/RFP-III.html>

Nominations Sought for National Genetic Resources Advisory Council

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is seeking nominees for the newly reestablished National Genetic Resources Advisory Council. The purpose of the Council is to formulate recommendations on actions and policies for the collection, maintenance, and utilization of genetic resources; to make recommendations for coordination of genetic resources plans of domestic and international organizations; and to advise the Secretary of Agriculture of new and innovative approaches to genetic resources conservation. Nominations are due by 30 June. For more information, visit <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2011-05-16/html/2011-11926.htm>.

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 3rd 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 3rd 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.

NSC Alliance Annual Meeting Wrap-Up

The NSC Alliance recently met in San Francisco, California in conjunction with the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections (SPNHC). Although the NSC Alliance contingent was smaller than desired, those in attendance enjoyed productive discussions and meetings. For its part of the program, the NSC Alliance organized a plenary discussion panel on federal science policy. Panelists included NSC Alliance President William Brown, NSC Alliance Past-President Michael Mares, AIBS and NSC Alliance Director of Public Policy Robert Gropp, and University of Colorado Museum of Natural History Curator of Invertebrate Zoology Robert Guralnick. The panelists discussed various policy opportunities and challenges confronting natural science collections. A theme of the discussions, however, was the importance and need for collections to work collaboratively to advance policy agendas that can help move the community forward and stimulate investments that will invigorate collections and advance science.

Some NSF Programs To Limit Researchers to One Proposal Per Funding Cycle

A recent dear colleague letter from the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Division of Molecular and Cellular Biosciences outlines changes to the division's procedures for research proposal submission and review. The letter follows:

Beginning in 2011, the Division of Molecular and Cellular Biosciences in the Directorate for Biological Sciences (BIO) will initiate new procedures, on a trial basis, for the submission and review of research proposals. BIO seeks to improve the efficiency with which it processes proposals while maintaining the highest quality of merit reviews and funding selections. The goal of these new procedures is to better manage proposal processing in the face of increasing numbers of proposals, to reduce the growing burden on the PI and reviewer community, and to improve funding rates.

As noted in the 2007 IPAMM Report, both the number of proposals submitted to NSF per year and the number of research proposals submitted per PI has increased substantially. A significant number of NSF reviewers surveyed for the IPAMM Report indicated that overall reviewer workload had increased in the preceding three years. If anything, the intervening years have only increased both the proposal submission rate and the resulting burden on the reviewer community.

In response to this growing problem, the Division of Molecular and Cellular Biosciences is revising its procedures for submission and review of research proposals. The Division of

Molecular and Cellular Biosciences (MCB) will implement an eight month cycle for proposal submission in order to give the PIs of declined proposals additional time for revision. Deadlines for full proposal submission will be: September 6, 2011, May 21, 2012 and January 28, 2013. In addition, the number of full proposals submitted per 8-month cycle by an investigator will be restricted to one proposal as a PI or co-PI. Full details about these changes can be found in the new Program Solicitation "Division of Molecular and Cellular Biosciences: Investigator-initiated research projects"

(http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?WT.z_pims_id=503626&ods_key=nsf11545) posted on the Division's web site. A set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about these changes also can be found on the Division web site.

EAGERs, RAPIDs, and conference/workshop proposals will continue to be accepted at any time. Research at Undergraduate Institutions (RUI) and Research Coordination Networks (RCN) proposals targeted to MCB should be submitted by the Division deadlines listed above. Special activities such as CAREER will continue to be governed by their own solicitations, and are NOT affected by the changes described above. Supplement requests should be submitted by February 15 to be considered for funding in the same fiscal year.

Sincerely,
Dr. Joann Roskoski
Assistant Director (Acting)
Directorate for Biological Sciences

Alert: Rhino Horn Thefts

A recent report from Europe warns that thieves are targeting rhino horns from natural history museum exhibits. The alert notes at least three recent thefts from Coimbra, Portugal, and Hamburg and Bamberg, Germany. Some evidence suggests that the robberies, which took place between 20 April and 4 June 2011, were conducted by an organized band of criminals. It is possible that the thieves are affiliated with international networks. It may be that the group identifies and monitors public exhibitions/galleries during normal exhibition hours and then breaks into buildings and showcases after the museum closes. Only original horns have been stolen, replicas and casts have been left behind.

If you are aware of similar thefts or have other information, please alert authorities.

GAO Identifies Areas of Improvement for Smithsonian's Repatriation of Indian Human Remains

A review of the Smithsonian Institution by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that the Smithsonian has yet to repatriate about a quarter of the Indian human remains and half of the funerary objects in its collections. The Smithsonian is required by the National Museum of the American Indian Act to inventory and identify the origins of Indian human remains and funerary objects and to repatriate them to culturally affiliated Indian tribes upon request.

One limitation in the repatriation efforts has been a lack of a reliable estimate of the total number of human remains and funerary objects in the care of the Smithsonian. At the pace that repatriation is progressing, the GAO estimates that it could be several more decades before the process is complete.

One recommendation from GAO to improve the process is to expand the jurisdiction of the Smithsonian's Repatriation Review Committee to include the American Indian Museum, which it has previously provided no oversight. Additionally, GAO recommended that the Smithsonian Institution develop a policy for the disposition of human remains that are not culturally identifiable.

To read the GAO report, visit <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-11-515>.

Hungarian Natural History Museum Threatened, Reports Nature

According to a Nature News article published online on 7 June 2011 (see <http://www.nature.com/news/2011/110607/full/474139a.html>), the Hungarian Natural History Museum may be evicted from its current location this year. According to the Nature News report, "The Hungarian government plans to turn the historic Budapest building given to the museum after the fall of communism in 1989 into a university to train the military or the police."

Scientists in and out of Hungary are concerned by the potential relocation of the museum. As Marian Turner reported in Nature News, scientists are "shocked by the move because the imposing 1836 Ludovika building has been extensively renovated for the museum, and curators are still moving the collections in. They say that the museum has not been offered an alternative site, and fear that the collections will have to be stored in crates until a new home is found."

To read the full report, please visit <http://www.nature.com/news/2011/110607/full/474139a.html>.

U.S. to Allow More Foreign STEM Graduates to Extend Stay after University

On 12 May 2011, United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement announced that it was expanding the list of degree fields that would allow students on visas to stay in the United States after graduating from college.

Typically, foreign graduates have 12 months after completing their degree to gain employment and seek a H1-B visa or leave the country. Graduates of certain science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) degree programs can work for up to 29 months after graduation without changing their visa status.

Some of the degrees recently added include environmental science, marine science, neuroscience, and agronomy and crop science. To view the full list of exempted degrees, visit <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm>.

According to the National Science Foundation, about 103,000 science and engineering degrees were awarded in the U.S. to non-residents in 2007.

IMLS FY 2012 Guide to Programs and Opportunities

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) has released its fiscal year 2012 Guide to Programs and Opportunities. The booklet provides a succinct overview of IMLS grant and award programs, initiatives, and research for the fiscal year beginning October 1, 2011. The guide also includes useful tips and tools you can use to develop competitive grant applications and staff contact information for each grant program. Download the guide at www.ims.gov/pdf/2012_Guide.pdf.

NAS Reports Are Now Free

As of 2 June 2011, all PDF versions of reports published by the National Academies Press will be downloadable free of charge to anyone. The Academies hopes this move will increase readership and use its products.

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.