

# **NSC Alliance Washington Report**

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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 Survey Looks at Economy and Natural Science Collections – Please Complete the Survey Online Today**

Two years ago as the economy was entering recession, the Natural Science Collections Alliance (NSC Alliance) conducted a survey to gather data on the effects of the economic downturn on natural science collections. To further our understanding of how natural science collections are being impacted by and responding to current economic conditions, the NSC Alliance is repeating the 2008 survey. All natural science collections, including natural history museums, herbaria, living collections, tissue and genetic collections, etc, are encouraged to complete this online survey. The survey should not take about 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Individual institutional responses will remain confidential.

Please complete the survey now at [http://nscalliance.org/?page\\_id=314](http://nscalliance.org/?page_id=314). The survey will close on 20 September 2010.

Additional information about the 2008 NSC Alliance survey, including a link to a publication containing the results, is available at <http://nscalliance.org/?p=234>.

If you have questions or require additional information, please contact Dr. Robert Gropp at [rgropp@aibs.org](mailto:rgropp@aibs.org).

### **NSF Announces New Grant Support for Digitization of Biological Collections**

The National Science Foundation (NSF) has announced a new grant program, “Advancing Digitization of Biological Collections,” for scientific collections. According to NSF documents, the program seeks to “create a national resource of digital data documenting existing biological collections and to advance scientific knowledge by improving access to digitized information (including images) residing in vouchered scientific collections across the United States.”

NSF has stated a goal of making 7-12 competitive awards totaling \$10 million in fiscal year 2011, assuming adequate appropriations of funds. Of these planned awards, 6-11 are anticipated to be “Thematic Collections Networks,” and 1 award is planned to be a “Home Uniting Biocollections (HUB).”

For more information, including links to the Request for Proposal (RFP), please visit [http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm\\_summ.jsp?pims\\_id=503559&org=NSF&sel\\_org=NSF&from=fund](http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=503559&org=NSF&sel_org=NSF&from=fund).

### **Report Assesses Nation's Botanical Capacity**

The Botanical Capacity Assessment Project (BCAP) has released a report, "Assessing Botanical Capacity to Address Grand Challenges in the United States." The report, which includes recommendations for the government, academia, and non-governmental organizations, is believed to be the first assessment of the nation's botanical capacity.

The Chicago Botanic Garden and Botanic Gardens Conservation International's U.S. office worked with several partners to assess strengths and areas for improvement in plant science education, research and habitat management in the United States. This one-year, grant-funded project involved four key stages: 1) literature review, 2) survey of the botanical community, 3) workshop with key stakeholders, and 4) production and distribution of a report.

A brief report summary reads: "Botanical capacity plays a fundamental role in solving the grand challenges of the next century, including climate change, sustainability, food security, preservation of ecosystem services, conservation of threatened species, and control of invasive species. Yet critical components of botanical education, research and management are lacking across government, academic, and private sectors. A recent nationwide survey revealed severe shortages of botanists at government agencies, a wave of upcoming retirements, and an alarming decline in botanical degree programs and course offerings at the nation's colleges and universities. Private sector organizations are helping to fill identified gaps in capacity, but need to work strategically with all sectors to ensure their sustainability into the future. If botanical capacity continues to erode at its current rate, the nation's science, sustainability, and land management agenda will suffer, opportunities to economically and efficiently solve environmental challenges will be lost, and our public and private lands will continue to degrade."

The final report and brief summary documents are available for free online at <http://www.bgci.org/usa/bcap>.

### **White House Releases Guidance on Science Priorities for FY 2012 Budget**

On 21 July, the White House's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) issued a joint memorandum providing guidance to federal agencies on the formulation of science and technology priorities in the fiscal year (FY) 2012 budget. The memo directs agencies to prioritize funding in six areas: 1) promoting sustainable economic growth and job creation; 2) defeating the most dangerous diseases and achieving better health outcomes for all while reducing health care costs; 3) moving toward a clean energy future to reduce dependence on energy imports while curbing greenhouse gas emissions; 4) understanding, adapting to, and mitigating the impacts of global climate change; 5) managing the competing demands on land, fresh water, and the oceans for the production of food, fiber, biofuels, and ecosystem services based on sustainability and biodiversity; and 6) developing the technologies to protect our troops, citizens, and national interests.

Among these priorities are several in the areas of energy, environment, health, and agriculture, consistent with the National Research Council's report on 21st Century Biology. The need to support the foundation of a new "bio-economy" through advancements in biotechnology and design of biological systems was also referenced. Additionally, agencies are directed to invest in high-risk, high-reward research, support multidisciplinary research, and engage in international scientific collaboration.

The memo also includes a provision on federal science collections: "Agencies should implement strategies for increasing the benefits for science and society derived from scientific collections by following the recommendations in the report by the Interagency Working Group on Scientific Collections and efforts outlined in the National R&D Strategy for Microbial Forensics."

Ocean observation was also highlighted, with a goal to "develop and deploy integrated ocean observing capabilities to support ecosystems-based management, including under conditions of changing climate and multiple stressors (e.g. oil spills)."

### **NSF Leadership Changes**

On 5 August 2010, the White House announced the nomination of Dr. Cora Marrett to be the next deputy director of the National Science Foundation (NSF). Marrett, a sociologist by training, is currently serving as acting director of NSF. From January 2009 until June 2010 she held the post of acting deputy director, the number two spot in the science agency. Prior to that, Dr. Marrett was the assistant director for Education and Human Resources, where she led the agency's work in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education.

Marrett's nomination is subject to approval by the Senate. The chamber has yet to act upon President Obama's June nomination of Subra Suresh to be the next director of NSF. Suresh is currently dean of the School of Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

### **NSC Alliance Calls for Collections to be Included in NOAA Strategic Plan**

On August 2, 2010, NSC Alliance submitted comments on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) draft Next Generation Strategic Plan. The comments identify the importance of NOAA's scientific collections to the agency's mission and call for the strategic plan to "address the curation of, and access to, the 40 scientific collections held by the agency."

As currently drafted, the strategic plan does not address scientific collections. For more information on NOAA's draft strategic plan, visit <http://www.ppi.noaa.gov/ngsp.html>. To read NSC Alliance's full comments, visit <http://nscalliance.org/?p=313>.

### **Russian Plant Genetic Collection at Risk**

A Russian plant genebank is at risk of destruction after a court ruled on 11 August 2010 in favor of plans for redeveloping the land as a housing development. The Pavlovsk Experiment Station, Europe's largest collection of fruits and berries, houses hundreds of varieties of raspberries, cherries, strawberries, and gooseberries, many of which are thought to be extinct in the wild. More than 90% of the collection is found in no other research collection or genebank. The N.I. Vavilov Institute of Plant Industry, which runs the station, plans to appeal the ruling, but is not hopeful that they will be given enough time to move the collection. "To move the collection of fruits, berries, and ornamental plants would take at least 10 to 15 years," said Fyodor Mikhovich, director of the research station. "Nobody's going to wait that long to build houses."

### **NIH Updates Its Best Practices for Cancer Biospecimens**

The National Cancer Institute at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has updated its Best Practices for Biospecimen Resources. Major revisions include the addition of new sections on biospecimen resource management and operations and conflict of interest, expansion of recommendations related to custodianship and informed consent, and harmonization with current federal guidance documents and recommendations from international biospecimen organizations. Public comments on the revised best practices are being accepted until September 22, 2010. For more information, visit <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2010/2010-20872.htm>.

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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).