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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.

Debt Deal Done, Sort of

On 2 August 2011, the President signed into law a package that would permit the federal debt ceiling to be lifted in exchange for deep cuts to discretionary and defense programs over the coming decade. The plan prevent the federal government from defaulting on it debt in August, but avoided making politically dangerous decisions about spending, and tax and entitlement reform. Under the plan, a bipartisan, bicameral committee is to be formed and charged with reporting to Congress this November with a plan that would produce as much as \$1.5 trillion in additional savings. These reductions could come from cuts to discretionary and security programs, as well as savings from entitlement program reform or revenues from tax policy changes. If the committee fails to produce a plan that is passed by both chambers of Congress and signed by the President by the end of the year, mandatory cuts to discretionary and security programs (e.g. Defense, State, intelligence) would be implemented.

Despite the jubilation of Democratic and Republican leaders, some policy analysts as well as the progressive and conservative wings of both political parties are increasingly skeptical about the merits of the agreement. Moreover, the political theater and brinksmanship that lead to the deal have resulted in Standard and Powers lowering the United States’ credit rating due to fears over the ability of the political system to reach a viable, long-term policy response to the federal deficit.

In brief, the final plan will reportedly provide for an immediate increase to the federal debt ceiling. According to White House documents, the plan would also:

- Immediately impose a 10-year discretionary spending cap generating nearly \$1 trillion in deficit reduction, balanced between defense and non-defense spending.
- Provide the President with the authority to increase the debt limit by at least \$2.1 trillion, eliminating the need for further increases until 2013.
- Establish a bipartisan committee process tasked with identifying an additional \$1.5 trillion in deficit reduction, including from entitlements and tax reform. The committee is required to report legislation by 23 November 2011, which receives fast-track protections. Congress is required to vote on Committee recommendations by 23 December 2011.
- Create an enforcement mechanism established to force all parties – Republican and Democrat – to agree to balanced deficit reduction. If the committee fails, the enforcement mechanism will trigger spending reductions beginning in 2013 – split 50/50 between domestic and defense spending. Medicaid, Social Security, and programs for the poor would be exempted from these cuts.

NSF Solicits Proposals for Advancing Digitization of Biological Collections

The National Science Foundation (NSF) has announced the availability of funding to enhance and expand digitization of and access to existing biological and paleontological collections in the United States.

The solicitation differs from NSF's first digitization grant opportunity in several ways. It provides multiple year deadlines for the program. It allows smaller requests from collections to become partners to existing networks in order to fill gaps in digitization. Funding will be prioritized to projects that fill these gaps in online access to specimen data and that integrate with ongoing digitization activities. The Directorate for Geosciences, Earth Science Division has also been added as a formal program partner.

Proposals are due by 31 October 2011. For more information, visit http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=503559&org=BIO&from=home.

Deadline Approaching for Nominations for the NSC Alliance Board

Annual NSC Alliance Board elections are getting underway, as per the NSC Alliance Bylaws (http://nscalliance.org/?page_id=16), which state:

“The Nominating Committee shall furnish the names of nominees to the Secretary, who shall circulate them either in written or electronic form (e.g., web site) to the members at least thirty (30) days in advance of the election in order to provide for additional names to be nominated by the membership. Nomination to the ballot from the membership requires written support from 10 members from any category of membership.”

Visit <http://nscalliance.org/?p=390> to view the proposed slate. Additional nominations (with written support from 10 members) may be sent to the Nominating Committee Chair, William Brown, at wycbrown@gmail.com, by 15 August 2011.

NSF Cuts BIO Funding Slightly in FY 2011 Spending Plan

NSF has released its spending plan for fiscal year (FY) 2011. Since Congress did not finish their work on FY 2011 appropriations until mid-April, NSF and other agencies have released their spending plans with only two months remaining in the fiscal year.

NSF received \$6.859 billion in FY 2011, \$12.6 million less than the previous year. According to the details recently released by NSF, BIO will receive \$711.6 million in FY 2011, a \$3.1 million decrease. Within the Biological Sciences Directorate, the Molecular and Cellular Biosciences, Integrative Organismal Systems, and Emerging Frontiers subactivities were cut slightly. Funding for Environmental Biology and Biological Infrastructure subactivities were raised by a small amount.

More details are available at http://www.nsf.gov/about/congress/112/highlights/cu11_0523.jsp.

NSC Alliance Sponsors Webinar to Help Scientists Engage in Public Policy

A new online presentation sponsored by the NSC Alliance aims to inform scientists about proposed federal funding for research and how individual scientists can help make the case for sustained federal investments in competitive, peer-reviewed grant programs. The webinar, presented as part of the 3rd Annual Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits event, features information on the federal budget process, pending Congressional appropriations bills that would fund biological research in fiscal year 2012, and tips for effective communication with lawmakers.

The webinar was presented by policy staff from the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) to participants of the 3rd Annual Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits event. NSC Alliance is a sponsor of the event, which will take place throughout the month of August 2011. This nationwide event encourages scientists to meet with their members of Congress in their home state in order to showcase the people, equipment, and facilities that are required to support and conduct scientific research.

NSC Alliance's event sponsorship means that NSC Alliance members may access a recording of this program until 2 September 2011. The webinar can be viewed for free at http://www.aibs.org/public-policy/congressional_district_visits_resources.html.

Help Shape the Future of IMLS

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is developing a strategic plan to guide its work and priorities over the next five years. The agency is currently soliciting feedback on the following topics:

-How can IMLS leverage its resources, position, reputation and relationships to promote effective public access to physical and digital content?

-How can IMLS leverage its resources, position, reputation and relationships to promote information services policy that sustains access to the American Public?

-How can IMLS leverage its resources, position, reputation and relationships to support learners throughout their lifetime in order to produce a competitive workforce and an engaged public?

-How can IMLS leverage its resources, position, reputation and relationships to help museums and libraries strengthen their roles as community anchor institutions to enhance the vibrancy and sustainability of their communities?

-How can IMLS model excellence in public management and effectively align and leverage its resources to maximize the value of taxpayer investments?

To submit feedback, read comments from others, or to vote upon proposed comments, visit <http://imls.ideascale.com/>. The deadline to provide input is 12 August 2011.

Presidential Science Advisors Recommend Accounting of Ecosystem Services

A new report by the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) urges the federal government to periodically assess the condition and value of the nation's ecosystem services. A Quadrennial Ecosystems Services Trends Assessment could build upon existing monitoring efforts, and could be conducted in conjunction with the quadrennial National Climate Assessment.

"It is common wisdom in business that economic growth depends on regular inventories of capital and assets, along with assessments of risks. Given that so much of our Nation's economy is underpinned by our ecosystems, it is only sensible to periodically take an accounting of our environmental capital and assess the risks to it," said Rosina Bierbaum, Dean of the School of Natural Resources and Environment at the University of Michigan, and co-chair of the working group that led the study. "Such assessments will greatly inform public policy concerning these assets."

The report recommends that the government improve online accessibility of biological diversity data that federal agencies already collect. One way to achieve this would be for the government to enforce existing requirements that federal agencies publish data related to biodiversity preservation and ecosystem services within one year of collection. The data.gov website could be an appropriate venue for hosting the data. A coordinating entity should also be established to "interact with international biodiversity and ecosystem information systems in the development of globally accepted biodiversity and ecosystem information standards, and should seek out and encourage partnerships with the private and academic sectors to develop innovative tools for data integration, analysis, visualization, and decision making," states the report.

PCAST also called for the development of more sophisticated methodologies, such as remote sensing, to value ecosystem services for better prioritization of the \$10 billion spent annually by federal agencies on ecological restoration and biodiversity-preservation activities.

To download a copy of the report, visit

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/pcast/sustainingenvironmentalcapital/report.pdf>.

NSC Alliance “Collective Knowledge” Booklet Now Online

Much of what we are beginning to understand about our world, we owe to the collection, preservation, and ongoing study of natural specimens. Properly preserved collections of plants, animals, rocks, soil, ice, insects, birds, and fish are libraries of Earth’s history, and vital to our ability to learn about our place in its future. “Collective Knowledge: The Value of Natural Science Collections,” published by NSC Alliance, is available for download at <http://nscalliance.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/collective-knowledge-nsc-booklet.pdf>. View this and other NSC Alliance publications at http://nscalliance.org/?page_id=10.

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.