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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

Reminder: Complete the 2010 NSC Alliance Survey on the Economy and Natural Science Collections – Survey Closes September 20, 2010

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, and so forth, are encouraged to complete this online survey. The survey should 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.

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>.

Science Organizations Urge Russia to Preserve Pavlovsk Experiment Station and its Living Plant Collections

On September 16, 2010, the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) and the Ecological Society of America (ESA) issued an open letter urging the Russian government to preserve the Pavlovsk Experiment Station in Saint Petersburg. The facility is home to more than 5,000 distinct varieties of fruit trees and plants, most of which are extinct or endangered around the world. Many of these plant species have been cultivated at the site since 1926. Established by the internationally acclaimed Russian botanist, Nikolai Vavilov, the 200 acres which the Pavlovsk Experiment Station (part of the Vavilov Institute of Plant Industry) occupies are set to be auctioned off for real estate development in late September 2010.

In addition to urging action to preserve the Pavlovsk plant collections, the letter draws attention to the importance of natural science collections. "Biological collections, whether living or non-living, are vitally important to humanity," stated Dr. Joseph Travis, president of the American Institute of Biological Sciences. "Natural science collections have provided insights into a wide variety of biological issues and pressing societal problems. These research centers help identify new food sources, develop treatments for disease and suggest how to control invasive pests. Natural science collections belong to the world and cannot be limited by geographic borders."

Travis also encouraged governmental and non-governmental organizations to work collaboratively to ensure that we maintain and conserve the irreplaceable genetic information in natural science collections that has been collected by scientists over the past several hundred years. "For example, the proposed elimination of the Pavlovsk Experiment Station in Russia would close one of the doors on future innovations in Russian science and agriculture and, by doing so, hinder Russia's ability to contribute to developing new food crops for the world."

The complete letter is available at http://www.aibs.org/position-statements/20100916_aibs_esa_statem.html.

NSC Alliance, 13 Other Science Organizations Ask Senate to Support Public Access to Independent Scientific Research Assessments of the Gulf of Mexico

On September 15, 2010, the Natural Science Collections Alliance (NSC Alliance) joined 13 other scientific organizations to express concern "with the issue of intellectual property rights and ownership of research results that arise in the aftermath of incidents caused by industry, most recently, the BP oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico." In a letter delivered to every United States Senator, the groups stated that the "public needs access to results and conclusions not affected by legal wrangling or private ownership. We are writing specifically to request that a source of independent funding for research on actual or potential industry impacts be available and dispersed from an independent source."

The complete letter is available at http://www.aibs.org/position-statements/20100915_september_2010.html.

NSB Soliciting Award Nominations

The National Science Board (NSB) is accepting nominations for several awards. The application deadline is November 3, 2010.

- The 2011 Vannevar Bush Award
The Vannevar Bush Award is awarded annually to truly exceptional lifelong leaders in science and technology who have made substantial contributions to the welfare of the Nation through public service activities in science, technology, and public policy. Recent recipients include: Bruce Alberts, Editor-in-Chief, Science Magazine; Mildred Dresselhaus, Institute Professor, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and Norman Augustine, former Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of the Board, Lockheed Martin Corporation.

To nominate, visit www.nsf.gov/nsb/awards/bush.jsp.

- The 2011 National Science Board Public Service Award
The NSB Public Service Award honors individuals and groups that have made substantial contributions to increasing public understanding of science and engineering in the United States. These contributions may be in a wide variety of areas that have the potential of contributing to public understanding of and appreciation for science and engineering - including mass media, education and/or training programs, entertainment, among others. Recipients of the NSB Public Service Award include NUMB3RS, the CBS television drama series; Ira Flatow, Host and Executive Producer of NPR's "Science Friday"; Alfred P. Sloan Foundation; Bill Nye The Science Guy; and NOVA, the PBS television series.

To nominate, visit <http://www.nsf.gov/nsb/awards/public.jsp>.

Interior Department Accepting Comments on Proposed Scientific Integrity Plan

The Department of the Interior has released a draft policy on scientific integrity. The policy, which applies to all department personnel who engage in scientific activities or who directly supervise such employees, is the first of its kind for Interior. Public comments are being accepted through 20 September 2010. More information is available at <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2010/2010-21591.htm>.

New NSF Assistant Director for Education and Human Resources Sought

The National Science Foundation (NSF) is looking for a new chief for their Education and Human Resources directorate. In a recent letter, Dr. Cora Marrett, Acting Director of the National Science Foundation, announced that NSF has initiated a national search for a new assistant director to oversee the agency's efforts in undergraduate and graduate education, research on learning in formal and informal settings, and human resource development. Nominations are sought for candidates with outstanding leadership; a deep sense of scholarship; a grasp of the issues facing science, technology, engineering, and mathematics research and education; and the ability to serve effectively as a key member of the NSF management team. More information about the candidate search and the directorate's activities are available at <http://www.nsf.gov/od>. Recommendations are due by 8 October 2010.

Review Panel Finds Fault with IPCC

An independent panel has called for changes in the way the United Nations handles its assessments of climate change. Although the panel found that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has been “successful overall,” it needs to improve its governance and management, review process, characterization and communication of uncertainty, and transparency.

The panel made several recommendations, including the formation of an Executive Council to make ongoing decisions and the selection of an executive director to handle day-to-day operations. The panel also suggested changes to the review process for climate assessments, such as adopting “a more targeted and effective process for responding to reviewer comments,” and indicting controversies within a report. To deal with the issue of scientific uncertainty, the review panel recommended the implementation of a “qualitative level-of-understanding scale” in the Summary for Policymakers.

The review was conducted by the InterAcademy Council, a consortium of science academies from around the world, at the request of the IPCC and the United Nations. The review was prompted by recent allegations of mistakes in the 2007 IPCC report and of exclusion of climate science from the assessment process. Harold Shapiro of Princeton University, who chaired the independent review panel, wrote in his introduction to the review that these controversies, both real and perceived, have detracted from an otherwise successful program. “I think the errors made did dent the credibility of the process,” Shapiro told reporters

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.