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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.

Scientists to Meet with Members of Congress

The Natural Science Collections Alliance (NSC Alliance) is pleased to announce the start of the *4th Annual Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits* event. This nationwide initiative helps individual biologists and research centers meet with lawmakers while they are in their district for the August congressional recess. Scientists participating in the event are able to discuss the importance of life sciences research with the individuals responsible for casting the votes that shape the nation's science policy.

“Scientists are constantly generating new data and testing hypotheses of relevance to decisions being made by policymakers, and it is important that we take advantage of opportunities to meet and discuss our activities with them at every opportunity,” said Dr. Larry Page, President of the NSC Alliance, a 2012 sponsor of the event. “The more information that is available to policymakers, the better their decisions are likely to be and the more positive the economic and environmental impacts of those decisions.”

The *4th Annual Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits* event occurs during the month of August. Participating scientists and research facilities will meet with their members of Congress and their staff to show them first-hand the people, equipment, and processes involved with modern scientific research.

“It is exciting to see the growing interest in this effort from members of the scientific community,” said Dr. Robert Gropp, Director of Public Policy for the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS). “This year a number of leading scientific societies and organizations have joined us to sponsor and participate in this important event.”

In addition to AIBS, sponsors of the 2012 event are the Long-Term Ecological Research Network, Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University, and Natural Science Collections Alliance.

Gropp further said, “Federal lawmakers are in the midst of discussions to set the future economic course for our nation. Scientific research can and must play a central role in these discussions. It is through scientific innovation that we create quality jobs, new markets, and a stronger economy. These meetings help scientists show lawmakers how investments in research benefit society.”

Participants in the 2012 event include individual scientists and educators, field stations, museums, and other research centers across the nation.

“My involvement in the *Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits* stems from my desire to promote science policy issues that impact federal and local legislation,” said participant Lauren Neighbours, a graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. “I firmly believe that advocating for science policy changes and improvements are critical for scientific advancement in our country.”

Participants of the *Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits* were prepared for meetings by an online training session presented by AIBS that helps scientists understand how to translate their research in meaningful ways for non-technical audiences.

More information about the *Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits* event is available at www.aibs.org/public-policy/congressional_district_visits.html.

NSC Alliance Sponsors Webinar to Help Scientists Engage in Public Policy

A new online presentation sponsored by the Natural Science Collections Alliance aims to inform biologists about proposed federal funding for science and how individual scientists can encourage lawmakers to sustain federal investments in competitive, peer-reviewed grant programs. The webinar, presented as part of the *4th Annual Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits* event, features information regarding federal appropriations for biological and environmental research, tips for conducting a successful meeting with an elected official, and resources to craft and communicate an effective message.

The webinar was presented by policy staff from the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) to participants of the *4th Annual Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits* event. NSC Alliance is a sponsor of the event, which will take place throughout the month of August 2012. 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.

As a sponsor of this event, NSC Alliance is able to offer our members access to a recording of this webinar program until 9 September 2012. The webinar can be viewed for free at http://www.aibs.org/events/webinar/archived/Congressional_Visits/congressionalwebinar2012.mov.

New Director Named for National Museum of Natural History

Dr. Kirk Johnson has been selected to lead the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. He is currently chief curator and vice president of research and collections at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. Johnson will start his new position on 29 October 2012.

“Kirk brings an established national and international reputation as a top scientist, educator and museum administrator to the National Museum of Natural History,” said Wayne Clough, Secretary of the Smithsonian. “He is a perfect match to lead the museum—among the very best in the world—into the next decade.”

Johnson will oversee more than 460 employees, an annual federal budget of \$68 million, and a collection of more than 126 million specimens and artifacts—the largest collection at the Smithsonian. The Natural History Museum hosts an average of 7 million visitors a year. Its scientists publish about 500 scientific research contributions a year.

Johnson has a bachelor's degree in geology and fine arts from Amherst College, a master's degree in geology and paleobotany from the University of Pennsylvania, and a doctorate in geology and paleobotany from Yale University.

Johnson succeeds Cristián Samper who left the Smithsonian to become president and CEO of the Wildlife Conservation Society headquartered in New York City. Jonathan Coddington, associate director for research and collections, will serve as acting director of the museum until Johnson's arrival in October.

Action Alert: House Bill Would Cut Funding for Biology Research at USGS

Ecosystem and biological research programs at the United States Geological Survey (USGS) could be cut by \$28.8 million (-18 percent) if the House of Representative's Interior and Environment Appropriations bill is enacted in its current form. This is a disproportionate reduction when compared with other USGS programs and with the agency as a whole.

The research and monitoring programs that comprise the Ecosystems account within USGS are vital to the nation. These scientific activities help decision makers within other Interior bureaus, states, local governments, and the private sector to understand the status of our living resources. Much of this information is only collected by the USGS. Without it, our efforts to combat

invasive species, manage endangered and threatened species, address wildlife diseases, or restore degraded landscapes would be severely hampered.

The proposed cuts to USGS research include:

- \$8.5 million from wildlife and terrestrial endangered species research;
- \$7.5 million from terrestrial, freshwater, and marine ecosystem studies;
- \$4.6 million from fisheries research;
- \$4.4 million from monitoring of species and habitat status and trends; and
- \$3.8 million from the Cooperative Research Units, which are partnerships among universities, states, and USGS to conduct biological research in 38 states.

The House bill would spare a few biological programs at USGS from reductions. The invasive species and contaminant biology programs would both be flat funded at the 2012 level. Notably, the biological information management and delivery program would receive a \$5.6 million increase.

The House Appropriations Committee approved the legislation at the end of June. The Senate has yet to act on their version of the fiscal year 2013 Interior and Environment Appropriations bill.

Please take a few minutes to contact your Senators to share your concerns about these proposed cuts and to encourage them to oppose spending cuts to biological and ecosystems research at the USGS. Your voice is critical to defending these important scientific programs.

Take action at <http://capwiz.com/aibs/issues/alert/?alertid=61540211>.

Data Show that Federal Investment in Research Pays Dividends

In the Washington Watch column in the July 2012 issue of the journal *BioScience*, Julie Palakovich Carr explores some of the economic returns on federal investments in research. The complete article is now online at http://www.aibs.org/washington-watch/washington_watch_2012_07.html. The following is an excerpt from the report:

In 1990, the federal government formally launched an ambitious initiative to sequence the human genome, to identify all the genes in human DNA, and to develop the tools to store and allow access to this information. The effort took 13 years and cost the federal government \$3.8 billion. As is evidenced by technological advancements, the cultivation of new lines of research, and countless subsequent scientific discoveries, the Human Genome Project (HGP) was a success by nearly all measures. A question of interest to policymakers, however, is what the economic return on this kind of federal investment is.

The HGP generated great prosperity, according to a 2011 report by the Battelle Technology Partnership Practice. Between 1988 and 2010, human genome sequencing and associated activities by private industry and researchers generated \$796 billion in US economic output. This represents a return on investment of \$141 for every \$1 spent by the government. The HGP

has also generated an estimated 3.8 million job-years of employment and increased government revenue. As was reported by the Battelle group, the genomics-enabled industry generated more than \$3.7 billion in federal taxes and \$2.3 billion in state and local taxes in 2010 alone. “Thus in one year, revenues returned to government nearly equaled the entire 13-year investment in the HGP,” states the report.

Continue reading the article for free at http://www.aibs.org/washington-watch/washington_watch_2012_07.html.

Participate in Collections Care Professionals Survey

The American Institute for Conservation has created a survey to help identify the opportunities and challenges facing collections care professionals today. Collections professionals are encouraged to take the short survey at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/collectionscaresurvey>. The survey closes on 30 August 2012.

Enter the Faces of Biology Photo Contest

Science education is becoming more interactive through the use of technology and inquiry-based learning. Help the public and policymakers to better understand these new directions in science education by entering the Faces of Biology: Teaching and Learning. The contest is sponsored by the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS).

The contest is an opportunity to showcase science education. Photographs entered into the contest must depict a person or persons engaging in science education. Any level of education (K-12, undergraduate, graduate, or adult) is eligible. The depicted education may occur in a classroom, laboratory, museum, natural history collection, botanical garden, zoo, or elsewhere. Photos of education in any discipline of science, not just biology, are welcome.

The Grand Prize Winner will have his or her winning photo featured on the cover of *BioScience*, and will receive \$250 and a one year membership in AIBS, including a subscription to *BioScience*. The First and Second Place Winners will have his or her winning photo printed inside *BioScience*, and will receive a one year membership in AIBS, including a subscription to *BioScience*.

The contest ends on 30 September 2012 at 11:59:59 pm Eastern Time. For more information and to enter the contest, visit <http://www.aibs.org/public-programs/photocontest.html>.

On the Importance of Scientific Collections

A series of special reports by NSC Alliance takes an in depth look at scientists and institutions who are using scientific collections. The newest addition to the series, “Little Frog Faces Big

Challenges: Herpetology Collection is Repository for Data on Rare Frog,” considers the fate of the Illinois chorus frog. The species’ decline has been documented through natural history collections. Download this report and others 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.