

## **NSC Alliance Washington Report, Volume 3, Issue 13, October 25, 2012**

In this Issue:

- Plan to Vote This November
  - United Nations Pledges to Double Financial Support for Biodiversity Conservation
  - 'Gang of Eight' Senators Meet Privately about Solutions to Fiscal Cliff
  - NSF Awards Grants for Research on Dimensions of Biodiversity
  - Applications Being Accepted for the Museum Assessment Program
  - Symposium Highlights the Role of Ecosystems in National Security
  - *BioScience* Article Explores the History and Value of Natural History Collections
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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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### **Plan to Vote This November**

Election day is rapidly approaching. Participate in democracy by voting on Tuesday, November 6th.

The next Congress and President must address many significant issues. Many of these will affect every American and, potentially, the level of support for scientific research for years to come. Make your voice heard, vote on November 6th.

Contact your state board of elections to find your polling location or to learn about early voting opportunities.

To learn more about how some candidates, including both candidates for President, have responded to several questions about science, please visit <http://www.sciencedebate.org/debate12/>.

### **United Nations Pledges to Double Financial Support for Biodiversity Conservation**

After weeks of negotiations, the United Nations 11th meeting of the conference of parties (COP 11) to the Convention on Biological Diversity agreed to increase funding to halt global loss of biodiversity. This pledge will help nations to meet internationally agreed upon biodiversity targets set by the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 that was developed at COP 10 in Aichi, Japan.

On 20 October 2012, developed countries agreed to double resources for biodiversity protection. Developing states will now receive \$10 billion a year by 2015. Conservation groups, however, claim that aid falls at least an order of magnitude short of what is required to reach the Aichi Biodiversity Targets by 2020.

For the first time, developing nations, including India and several African states, pledged to boost their own biodiversity spending. Manmohan Singh, India's prime minister, committed over \$50 million. "Mobilizing the necessary financial resources from the public and private sector needed to ensure achievement of the 2020 targets remains a challenge... [but] developing economies have signaled their determination and sense of urgency to seize the opportunities by providing much needed additional support," said Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and Environmental Programme Executive Director.

Marine areas received special attention as part of renewed efforts to sustainably manage the world's oceans, particularly areas beyond national jurisdictions that presently receive little protection. The 193 parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity agreed to classify ecologically and biologically significant areas, and to transmit information on these sites to the UN General Assembly (UNGA). "While the agreed wording of the decision text is not as strong as some were pushing for... the pressure is now on the UNGA to develop a legal mechanism for defining the management and or protection of those sites in the high seas," said Ben Lascelles, Marine IBA Officer with BirdLife.

COP 11 called for enhanced collaboration between the Convention on Biological Diversity and UN climate change initiatives such as reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and for the establishment of a global collaborative partnership on sustainable wildlife management.

COP 11 also welcomed the recently established Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), and requested IPBES contribute to assessments of whether the Aichi Biodiversity Targets were being met. IPBES aims to address accelerating losses to biodiversity and ecosystem services by bridging the gap between basic science and policymakers.

### **'Gang of Eight' Senators Meet Privately about Solutions to Fiscal Cliff**

A bipartisan group of eight Senators has been meeting behind closed doors for months in an effort to reach a deal to avoid the negative impacts of the fiscal cliff - nearly \$7 trillion in deficit reduction set to begin in early 2013. The fiscal cliff is a combination of expiring tax cuts and already approved budget reductions, including \$1.2 billion in budget sequestration that will impact all aspects of the federal government, including science, environmental and public health programs, and defense and security programs.

The Senators recently took advantage of the current congressional recess to meet for three days. Details about the discussions have been closely guarded from public scrutiny.

The ‘Gang of Eight’ is comprised of Senators Mark Warner (D-VA), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Saxby Chambliss (R-GA), Tom Coburn (R-OK), Kent Conrad (D-ND), Michael Crapo (R-ID), Dick Durbin (D-IL), and Mike Johanns (R-NE).

Even if the bipartisan group of lawmakers is able to reach a compromise on how to address the nation’s deficit, the rest of Congress may not concur. Any grand bargain will need support from Congressional leaders from both sides of the aisle and both chambers of Congress. A major sticking point has been new revenue. Republicans have been unwilling to agree to tax increases, whereas Democrats are insisting on increased taxes for the wealthiest Americans. According to administration officials, President Obama will veto legislation to address the fiscal cliff unless it includes higher tax rates for the wealthy.

No announcement about a compromise is expected before the November election. Republicans and Democrats are expected to use the Presidential and Congressional election results as a way to bolster their respective bargaining positions, especially if control of one of the legislative chambers changes parties.

### **NSF Awards Grants for Research on Dimensions of Biodiversity**

The National Science Foundation (NSF) has awarded \$26.4 million for 14 research grants that will expand our understanding of biodiversity. “This year’s awardees will study subjects as diverse as the biota of the Amazon and its environment, how nutrient input drives biodiversity in China’s extremely oxygen-deprived – or eutrophic – Lake Taihu, the components of tree biodiversity, and the lineage of species in Hawaii,” according to a press release issued by NSF.

“The innovative and interdisciplinary teams of the Dimensions of Biodiversity program may accomplish in 10 years what, with a piecemeal approach, would have taken 50 years—a half-century we can no longer afford to wait,” says Joann Roskoski, NSF deputy assistant director for Biological Sciences.

This is the third year that NSF has funded research through its Dimensions of Biodiversity programs. The projects that use remote sensing will be co-funded by NASA. The program aims to integrate our understanding of taxonomy, genetic diversity, and functional role of taxa in order to understand the key dimensions of biodiversity in a changing world.

See the list of awardees at

[http://www.nsf.gov/news/news\\_summ.jsp?cntn\\_id=125495&WT.mc\\_id=USNSF\\_51&WT.mc\\_ev=click](http://www.nsf.gov/news/news_summ.jsp?cntn_id=125495&WT.mc_id=USNSF_51&WT.mc_ev=click).

### **Applications Being Accepted for the Museum Assessment Program**

The Museum Assessment Program (MAP) is seeking applications for its 2013 program. The MAP initiative helps small and mid-sized museums strengthen operations, plan for the future, and meet national standards through self-study and a site visit from a peer reviewer.

The program is funded by the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and throughout its 30 years has been administered by the American Alliance of Museums. Participating institutions receive a grant for \$4,000 of consultative resources and services.

The 2012 MAP participants include 126 museums from 39 states, encompassing small and mid-sized museums of all types. The range of MAP participants reflects the broad scope of America's museums, and a complete list of all MAP participants is available at [www.aam-us.org/map](http://www.aam-us.org/map).

Since its creation in 1981, MAP has provided more than 6,000 assessments to over 4,200 institutions across America. To apply to MAP for the 1 December 2012 deadline, visit [www.aam-us.org/map](http://www.aam-us.org/map).

### **Symposium Highlights the Role of Ecosystems in National Security**

Scientists are well aware of the importance of ecosystems to national security. These connections are often less well appreciated by policymakers. The Association of Ecosystem Research Centers (AERC) recently conducted a symposium and science briefing for policymakers to highlight the role of ecosystem services in our nation's security.

Presentations explored the value of ecosystems in food, energy, water, and human health security. Dr. Richard Ostfeld of the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies spoke about connections between biodiversity and human risk for infectious disease. Dr. Howard Passell of Sandia National Laboratory made the connection between ecosystem resilience and stability in the developing world. Dr. Molly Brown of NASA described methods to assess food security using remote sensing. Dr. Paolo D'Odorico of University of Virginia addressed water availability in light of global trade. Dr. Avner Vengosh of Duke University addressed the environmental impacts of energy production.

Videos of the half-day symposium are available on the AERC website (<http://www.ecosystemresearch.org/2012-meeting/index.htm>).

### ***BioScience* Article Explores the History and Value of Natural History Collections**

The September 2012 issue of the journal *BioScience* includes an article, "Doing Natural History." The paper is published in the journal's Biology in History section and explores how natural history research changed during the twentieth century. The article is available through libraries or to subscribers (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/bio.2012.62.9.8>).

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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).

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