

NSC Alliance Washington Report, Volume 4, Issue 1, January 17, 2013

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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.

Fiscal Cliff Deal Delays Sequestration

The agreement reached by federal lawmakers on New Year's Day (the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012) to avert the fiscal cliff was not the grand bargain that many had hoped for. Although the legislation made permanent many expiring tax cuts, the deal did not address the need to raise the debt limit or avert budget sequestration. Instead, action on those issues has been delayed for several months.

Congress allowed tax rates to increase for the first time in almost two decades by letting tax cuts expire for individuals who make more than \$400,000 a year. The new tax rates will generate about \$600 billion in new revenue over the next decade. The deal also extended a package of tax credits, including research and development expenses incurred by businesses.

The compromise delays the start of \$1.2 trillion in automatic across-the-board spending cuts. Sequestration was scheduled to begin at the start of 2013, but will now be delayed for two months. Sequestration would have resulted in \$586 million in cuts at the National Science Foundation, \$2.5 billion in cuts at the National Institutes of Health, and \$150 million in cuts from research and education programs at the Department of Agriculture this year. Nearly all other federal programs would have been impacted as well. Those cuts could still happen if lawmakers do not reach an agreement by early March on how to avert sequestration. The \$24 billion cost of the delay of sequestration will be covered by new revenue and by \$12 billion in alternative spending cuts to defense and non-defense programs over ten years.

Some lawmakers are unhappy that the law did not address all elements of the fiscal cliff, but rather kicked the proverbial can down the road. “We were trying to address the fiscal cliff and we spawned three more cliffs,” said Representative Xavier Becerra (D-CA). He said three battles will come in the next three months: a debt limit increase, sequestration, and expiration of funding for government programs under the current continuing resolution.

NSC Alliance Announces 2012 Accomplishments

In 2012, the NSC Alliance engaged in a number of notable activities to raise the profile of natural science collections with policymakers, researchers, and the general public. A few highlights are presented below:

- Conducted a Congressional briefing on digitization of natural science collections. The event was well attended by policymakers from Capitol Hill, federal agencies, and nongovernmental organizations.
- Coordinated a joint society letter to the National Science Foundation (NSF) to express concerns with a proposal to alter the Collections in Support of Biological Research program.
- Provided testimony to House and Senate Appropriations Committees in support of increased funding for the NSF and the Department of the Interior.
- Developed two issue briefs that help to articulate the importance of scientific collections, which are available at http://nscalliance.org/?page_id=10.
- Initiated planning with iDigBio and AIBS for a jointly sponsored workshop to be held at the 2013 Society for Preservation of Natural History Collections annual meeting.

Read all of NSC Alliance’s accomplishments from 2012 at <http://nscalliance.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/nsca-2012-summary.pdf>.

Chairman Smith Announces Changes to House Science Committee

In the 113th Congress, the House of Representatives Committee on Science, Space, and Technology will have a new chairman, Representative Lamar Smith (R-TX), as well as new leadership on several of its subcommittees. In addition, the Energy and Environment Subcommittee is being split into two separate panels.

Smith was selected by the Republican caucus in November to lead the full committee. Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) will serve as the vice-chair. Rep. James Sensenbrenner (R-WI) previously filled that position.

The Subcommittee on Research—previously the Research and Science Education panel—will be chaired by Rep. Larry Bucshon (R-IN). The panel will retain jurisdiction over science education despite the name change. Bucshon is a cardiothoracic surgeon whose southwestern Indiana district includes Indiana State University and the University of Southern Indiana.

Rep. Bucshon said in a statement: “I am honored to be selected as Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Research during my second term in Congress. Because of my background in science and medicine, I understand very well the importance of research in improving the life of all Americans and the role it plays in economic development. I look forward to working with the committee to foster innovation in the research industry so that we can create jobs and grow the economy in Indiana and nationwide.”

The previous chair of the Research and Science Education Subcommittee, Rep. Mo Brooks (R-AL) will remain on the Science Committee and will serve as vice-chair of the Space Subcommittee in the 113th Congress.

A newcomer to the committee, Rep. Cynthia Lummis (R-WY), will chair the newly created Subcommittee on Energy. Lummis had previously served on the House Appropriations Committee, but voluntarily left that panel this year in order to return to the Natural Resources Committee. It was reported that her change in committee assignments also had to do with disputes with Republican leadership over federal spending; Lummis voted against six of the seven appropriations bills brought to the floor last year.

A freshman was chosen to lead the Subcommittee on Technology. Rep. Thomas Massie (R-KY) previously served as an executive of a technology company before being elected to Congress. Although more senior members are usually chosen to lead subcommittees, Massie is not the first freshman to be selected. Two years ago, four of the five subcommittee chairs on the science panel were brand new lawmakers.

The Subcommittee on Environment will continue to be led by Rep. Andy Harris (R-MD), a second term lawmaker. The Oversight Subcommittee will again be chaired by Rep. Paul Broun (R-GA). Rep. Steven Palazzo (R-MS) will continue to lead the Space Subcommittee.

Senator Mikulski to Chair Appropriations Committee

Senator Daniel Inouye (D-HI) died on 17 December 2012. Senator Inouye had served as Chairman of the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee. Despite having been in the Senate for nearly fifty years, Inouye only became chair of the panel—which oversees allocation of annual federal spending—in 2009. He previously served as chair of the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee. During his tenure, Senator Inouye supported increased funding for federal programs, including veterans and infrastructure projects, as well as research and development.

After Inouye’s death, there was widespread speculation that there would be a scramble among the lawmakers in line to succeed him as chairman. Much to the surprise of some beltway insiders, Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) was named the new chair. Two more senior lawmakers passed up the opportunity. Senators Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Tom Harkin (D-IA) both decided to retain their current positions as chair of other Senate committees.

Senator Mikulski had previously chaired the Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Subcommittee, which allocates funds to the National Science Foundation, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NASA, and the Departments of Commerce and Justice. She will be the first woman to lead the full committee.

Senator Mikulski aims to complete annual spending bills in a timely manner, something that Congress has struggled to do in recent years, and to work in a bipartisan manner. “[I]f we take the time to listen to each other, to respect each other and listen to the needs of the people, we can really work to get more bang out of the buck and get more value for the dollar,” said Senator Mikulski in a speech on the Senate floor. “We can have a stronger economy and a safer country. We can be frugal without being heartless. And at the same time, we can assure the taxpayers that we’ve heard them. They want us to really do a better job with our spending but at the same time they want to see it done in an open and transparent process.”

Smithsonian Releases Catalog of Field Books

Catalog records for thousands of field books from the Smithsonian Institution are now available online. The Field Book Project makes available details about the collection of biological specimens from 542 collections housed at the Smithsonian Institution. More than 6,600 field books are included in the project.

In addition to the detailed catalog records, researchers now have access to 927 authority files providing biographical and historical details for the persons, organizations, and expeditions involved in the creation of these field books. A subset of these records includes digital images of field books for viewing alongside the records.

Access the Field Book Project at

http://collections.si.edu/search/results.htm?q=unit_code%3AFBR&tag.cstype=all.

Registration Open for Dried Insect Digitization Workshop

iDigBio, the National Science Foundation’s national HUB for Advancing Digitization of Biological Collections (ADBC), is pleased to announce the third in a series of preparation-specific workshops focusing on organizing, launching, maintaining, and/or enhancing a biological collections digitization program. This new workshop will focus on digitization of dried insect collections (pinned or packaged), to include specimen label databasing and specimen imaging.

The target audiences for these workshops include collection managers, curators, and directors in U.S. non-federal institutions that are planning, implementing, or enhancing a digitization program, regardless of collection size. The primary goal is to prepare participants to return to their home institutions with the necessary skills and knowledge to launch or enhance a digitization program, either individually, through collaboration with an existing Thematic Collections Network (TCN), as a Partner with an Existing Collections Network (PEN), or

through direct collaboration with iDigBio.

Workshop sessions will focus on practical application and hands-on implementation. The workshop will be held on 24-25 April 2013 at the Field Museum in Chicago, Illinois. More information is available at <https://www.idigbio.org/content/idigbio-announces-dried-insect-digitization-workshop-april-24-25-2013>.

New in *BioScience*: The Value of Hidden Scientific Resources

The December 2012 issue of the journal *BioScience* includes an article entitled “The Value of Hidden Scientific Resources: Preserved Animal Specimens from Private Collections and Small Museums.” The article highlights the value of small natural history collections in research. The article is available for free at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/full/10.1525/bio.2012.62.12.9>.

Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill Conference to be Held Next Week

The 2013 Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill and Ecosystem Science Conference will be held on 21-23 January in New Orleans. The program features scientific sessions on ecosystems of the open ocean, public health impacts of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, and environmental impacts of hydrocarbon discharge. More information is available at <http://gulfofmexicoconference.org/>.

Deadline Approaching: Graduate Student Leaders Sought to Shape Science Policy

Applications are now being accepted for the 2013 AIBS Emerging Public Policy Leadership Award. This award recognizes graduate students in the biological sciences who have demonstrated initiative and leadership in science policy. Recipients receive first-hand experience at the interface of science and public policy.

Winners receive:

- A trip to Washington, DC, to participate in the Biological and Ecological Sciences Coalition Congressional Visits Day, an annual event that brings scientists to the nation’s capital to advocate for federal investment in the biological sciences, with a primary focus on the National Science Foundation. The event will last for two days and will be held on 10-11 April 2013. Domestic travel and hotel expenses will be paid for the winners.
- Policy and communications training, and information on trends in federal science funding and the legislative process.
- Meetings with Congressional policymakers to discuss the importance of federal investments in the biological sciences.
- A 1-year AIBS membership, including a subscription to the journal *BioScience* and a copy of “*Communicating Science: A Primer for Working with the Media.*”
- An award certificate and membership in the EPPLA alumni network.

The 2013 award is open to U.S. citizens enrolled in a graduate degree program in the biological sciences, science education, or a closely allied field. Applicants should have a demonstrated interest in and commitment to science policy and/or science education policy. Prior EPPLA winners and AIBS science policy interns/fellows are not eligible.

Applications are due by 5:00 PM Eastern Time on Monday, 28 January 2013. The award application can be downloaded at <http://www.aibs.org/public-policy/eppla.html>.

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.