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In this Issue:

- Sign Up to Showcase Science to Policymakers This August
 - NSC Alliance, Coalition of Scientific Organizations Defend NSF Peer Review
 - NSC Alliance Endorses Guiding Principles for the America COMPETES Act Reauthorization
 - USDA Proposes New Rule for Preservation of Paleontological Resources
 - Action Alert: Voice Your Support for a Science Laureate
 - Survey Request: State of Taxonomy, Systematics Education
 - Call for Session Proposals: 2014 Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill and Ecosystem Science Conference
 - Enter the Faces of Biology: Broader Impacts Photo Contest
 - Museum Specimens Used to Discover Source of Deadly Fungus
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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.

Sign Up to Showcase Science to Policymakers This August

The Natural Science Collections Alliance is proud to announce that it is sponsoring the *5th Annual Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits* event – an initiative of the American Institute of Biological Sciences and Entomological Society of America.

This national initiative is an opportunity for scientists across the country to meet with their federal or state elected officials to showcase the people, facilities, and equipment that are required to support and conduct scientific research.

The *5th Annual Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits* event will be held throughout the month of August 2013. This event is an opportunity for scientists, graduate students, representatives of research facilities, and people affiliated with scientific collections to meet with their elected officials without traveling to Washington, DC. Participants may either invite their elected officials to visit their research facility or can meet at the policymaker's local office.

Participants will be prepared for their meeting with a lawmaker through an interactive training webinar. Individuals participating in this event will receive information about improving their communication skills, tips for conducting a successful meeting with an elected official, and information about federal funding for biological research.

Participation is free for NSC Alliance members, but registration will close on July 15, 2013. For more information and to register, visit http://www.aibs.org/public-policy/congressional_district_visits.html.

NSC Alliance, Coalition of Scientific Organizations Defend NSF Peer Review

A coalition of 110 scientific organizations signed a letter in defense of peer review at the National Science Foundation (NSF). The NSC Alliance was one of the organizations that endorsed the statement. The letter was prompted by recent congressional actions that called into question the merit review process used by the National Science Foundation (NSF) to award research grants.

“It is imperative that NSF’s system of support for basic research be based upon excellence, competitive scientific merit, and peer-review,” states the letter. “While Congress does play an important role in oversight of federally funded research, it should avoid legislative attempts that could undermine a decades-long system of success and ultimately impede discovery and innovation.”

Among the congressional actions that prompted concern within the scientific community is the High Quality Research Act, a draft bill would increase the workload of NSF program managers and create another new regulatory requirement for scientists. If enacted, the bill would require the director of NSF to certify that any grant is in the best interests of the United States, not duplicative of other research efforts, and of the highest quality.

Three former directors of NSF and three former chairmen of the National Science Board spoke out against the draft bill in a recent letter to the leaders of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee. The former NSF leaders said that the draft bill would have “a chilling and detrimental impact on the merit-based review process.”

View the letter at <http://nscalliance.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/merit-review-rep-smith-52013.pdf>.

NSC Alliance Endorses Guiding Principles for the America COMPETES Act Reauthorization

The NSC Alliance has joined a broad coalition of scientific organizations and universities in endorsing a set of guiding principles for the reauthorization of the America COMPETES Act. The law outlines policies and goals for ensuring America’s continued international leadership in science and engineering.

Congress is currently considering changes to the America COMPETES Act. The House Science, Space, and Technology Committee could vote on legislation in the near future.

The principles focus on:

- Ensuring funding growth for basic science and engineering research across all disciplines and major research agencies;
- Maintaining and promoting scientific literacy and strengthening the pipeline of scientists and engineers; and
- Preserving research excellence and opportunity by sustaining the research funding system of peer review and reducing or eliminating unnecessary regulations.

Read the complete principles at

https://www.aau.edu/registration/public/Guiding_Principles_for_Community_Support_of_America_COMPETES_Reauthorization_as_of_4-18-13.pdf.

USDA Proposes New Rule for Preservation of Paleontological Resources

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is proposing to implement regulations to provide for the preservation, management, and protection of paleontological resources on federal lands. The rule would address the management, collection, and curation of paleontological resources from federal lands including management using scientific principles and expertise, collecting of resources with and without a permit, curation in an approved repository, maintaining confidentiality of specific locality data, and authorizing penalties for illegal collecting, sale, damaging, or otherwise altering or defacing paleontological resources.

Public comments must be received by 22 July 2013. More information is available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2013-05-23/html/2013-12173.htm>.

Action Alert: Voice Your Support for a Science Laureate

A bipartisan group of lawmakers have introduced legislation to create the position of Science Laureate for the United States. The bill would allow the President to appoint up to three Science Laureates to engage the public and increase public awareness of science. Appointments would be made on the basis of an individual's scientific contributions and ability to foster public interest in science.

If you support the establishment of a Science Laureate, you can send a letter to your Representative and Senators asking them to co-sponsor the Science Laureates of the United States Act of 2013.

Take action on the AIBS Legislative Action Center at <http://capwiz.com/aibs/issues/alert/?alertid=62675261>.

Survey Request: State of Taxonomy, Systematics Education

The NSC Alliance has been asked to circulate the following survey.

Dear Colleagues:

We are writing to invite you to participate in a survey on the state of teaching in taxonomy and systematic biology. If your area of expertise and interest lies outside of this discipline, you may simply ignore this invitation or perhaps forward it to an appropriate colleague.

We are conducting the survey as independent scholars and are not representing any institution or organization. An article by Costello et al. earlier this year (“Can we name earth’s species before they go extinct?”, *Science* 339: 413) painted an optimistic picture that seems at odds with many papers over the past decade claiming a decline in taxonomy and systematic biology. We were unable to find recent data supporting either claim and decided that it would be of value to the community to gather some basic data. Our intent is to summarize and make the data available to the community in a brief publication.

Our examination of the state of teaching is obviously only one facet of a complex issue, but having the results of this survey will, we hope, help. We have asked you to identify your institution so that we can detect multiple responses from any single source. We will not identify you or your institution in our published results.

The survey instrument may be found at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/systematicbiologyteaching>.

Thank you in advance for your participation in the survey.

Andrew Brower
Quentin Wheeler
Elizabeth Yockey

Call for Session Proposals: 2014 Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill and Ecosystem Science Conference

The 2014 Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill and Ecosystem Science Conference is soliciting proposals from the community for sessions to address the conference themes and integrative topics. For guidelines and submission instructions, please visit <http://gulfofmexicoconference.org/program/scientific-sessions/>. The deadline for submissions is 30 June 2013.

Enter the Faces of Biology: Broader Impacts Photo Contest

Biological research is transforming our society and the world. Help the public and policymakers to better understand these broader impacts in biological research by entering the Faces of Biology: Broader Impacts Photo Contest. The contest is sponsored by the American Institute of Biological Sciences.

The theme of the contest is broader impacts of biology. Photographs entered into the contest should demonstrate how biological research is transforming our society and the world. Examples of broader impacts include, but are not limited to, informing natural resources management, improving human health, addressing climate change, enhancing food or energy security, advancing foundational knowledge, and improving science education.

The First Place Winner will have his/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 Second and Third Place Winners will have his/her winning photo printed inside *BioScience*, and will receive a one year membership in AIBS, including a subscription to *BioScience*. The contest ends on September 30, 2013 at 11:59:59 pm Eastern Time.

For more information and to enter the contest, visit <http://www.aibs.org/public-programs/photocontest.html>.

Museum Specimens Used to Discover Source of Deadly Fungus

Scientists have identified a likely source of the deadly amphibian disease *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*. A species of frog that was used decades ago in human pregnancy tests is a carrier of the fungus, which now threatens the survival of many species of amphibians.

The African clawed frog was used in the 1930's to 1950's around the world. Once another pregnancy test was developed, some of the frogs were released into the wild.

Researchers have discovered the deadly fungus on museum specimens of African clawed frogs collected between 1871 and 2010. Their study shows that the disease was present in the species prior to their export worldwide.

The study is available on PLoS One at <http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0063791>.

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.