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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. With proper attribution to NSC Alliance, all material from these reports may be reproduced or forwarded. We encourage you to share this report with colleagues at your institution.

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.

NSC Alliance Announces 2013 Accomplishments

In 2013, the NSC Alliance engaged in a number of notable activities to raise the profile of natural history collections with policymakers, researchers, and the general public. A few highlights are presented below:

- Sponsored a symposium with iDigBio on digitization and dissemination of natural history data. The event was held at the 2013 Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections (SPNHC) annual meeting.
- Provided testimony to House and Senate Appropriations Committees in support of increased funding for research, curation, and digitization of natural history collections from the National Science Foundation and the Department of the Interior.
- Sponsored the 5th Annual Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits event. Several NSC Alliance member organizations participated.

Read all of NSC Alliance's accomplishments from 2013 at <http://nscalliance.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/nsca-2013-summary.pdf>.

Congress Approves Spending Plan for FY 2014

In mid-January, Congress overwhelmingly approved a \$1.012 trillion spending plan to fund the federal government for the remainder of fiscal year (FY) 2014, which runs through 30 September 2014. The plan (HR 3547) will increase funding by \$44 billion above the levels established by a 2011 budget deal.

The law, also called an omnibus, is a package of 12 appropriations bills that collectively fund the entire federal government. This is the first time since 2011 that all 12 bills were enacted; in recent years several sectors of the government have operated under continuing resolutions that maintain the previous year's budget.

Science agencies did well relative to the FY 2013 post-sequestration levels. Increased funding was provided for:

- National Science Foundation: \$7.2 billion (+4.2 percent)
 - The increase will provide 780 more competitive grants in FY 2014.
- National Institutes of Health: \$29.9 billion (+3.5 percent)
 - NIH could offer funding for 385 additional research grants.
- Department of Energy Office of Science: \$5.1 billion (+9.7 percent)
 - This funding level includes \$610 million for biological and environmental research.
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration: \$5.3 billion (+10.7 percent)
- Agricultural Research Service, the intramural research program for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA): \$1.1 billion (+10.2 percent)
- Agriculture and Food Research Initiative, USDA's extramural competitive grants program: \$316.4 million (+14.5 percent)
- Environmental Protection Agency, Science and Technology: \$759.2 million (+1.9 percent)
- U.S. Geological Survey: \$1.0 billion (+2.0 percent)
 - This includes \$152.8 million for the Ecosystems Activity.
- Smithsonian Institution: \$805 million (+4.3 percent)

The plan passed with the support of 72 Senators, including all Democrats, both Independents, and 17 Republicans. In the House of Representatives, 367 lawmakers voted in favor of the bill and 67 voted against. All but three of the 'nay' votes came from Republicans. President Obama signed the bill into law on 17 January 2014.

House Panel Considers Smithsonian's Research

The House Science Subcommittee on Research and Technology held a hearing on 14 January 2014 on scientific research at the Smithsonian Institution. The hearing provided the leadership of the Smithsonian an opportunity to showcase its varied scientific research programs.

Six Representatives attended the hearing: Chairman Larry Bucshon (R-IN), Ranking Member Daniel Lipinski (D-IL), Thomas Massie (R-KY), Robin Kelly (D-IL), Randy Hultgren (R-IL), and Chris Collins (R-NY).

Lawmakers seemed generally supportive of Smithsonian's work and asked questions about a diverse array of issues, including:

- The uniqueness of Smithsonian's research from the scientific work of other federal agencies;
- Big data and public access to data from federal scientific collections;
- Preservation of biodiversity through DNA and seed banks;
- Funding for climate change research;
- Measuring outcomes of Smithsonian's science education programs;
- Partnerships with private entities on science education;
- Deaccessioning collections in local museums; and
- The ability of museums across the country to develop new exhibits.

To watch a recording of the hearing, visit <http://science.house.gov/hearing/subcommittee-research-and-technology-hearing-scientific-research-smithsonian-more-museum>.

Participate in the Biological and Ecological Sciences Congressional Visits Day

Scientists and graduate students interested in communicating the importance of federal investments in scientific research and education to lawmakers are invited to participate in the Biological and Ecological Sciences Coalition (BESC) Congressional Visits Day in Washington, DC.

This event is an opportunity for scientists to meet with their members of Congress to discuss the importance of federal funding for biological research and education. Event participants advocate for federal investments in biological sciences research, with a primary focus on the National Science Foundation, as well as other federal agencies.

BESC is co-chaired by the American Institute of Biological Sciences and the Ecological Society of America.

This year's event will be held on 9-10 April 2014 in Washington, DC. The first day is a training program that will prepare participants for meetings with congressional offices. The second day is spent on Capitol Hill meeting with members of Congress and their staff.

There is no cost to participate in this event, but space is limited. BESC and its member organizations are not able to pay/reimburse participants for their expenses.

Learn more about the event and express your interest in participating at http://www.aibs.org/public-policy/congressional_visits_day.html. The deadline to sign up is 5 March 2014.

NSF Announces Solicitation for Dimensions of Biodiversity Program

The National Science Foundation has released a program solicitation for the Dimensions of Biodiversity program. The agency anticipates awarding 8 to 12 grants in an amount totaling \$16-\$22 million.

The Dimensions of Biodiversity program aims to transform “how we describe and understand the scope and role of life on Earth.”

Proposals are due by 3 April 2014. For more information, see the program solicitation at http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2014/nsf14525/nsf14525.htm?WT.mc_id=USNSF_25&WT.mc_ev=click.

NSF Releases Guidance for Ideas Labs Applications

The National Science Foundation has released a dear colleague letter on the topic of “Preparing Applications to Participate in Phase I Ideas Labs on Undergraduate STEM Education.” The letter provides additional guidance on the specific themes of the three Ideas Labs, which aim to address grand challenges related to workforce development in the biological sciences, the geological sciences, and engineering. The deadline to apply is 4 February 2014. Read the letter at http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2014/nsf14033/nsf14033.jsp?WT.mc_id=USNSF_25&WT.mc_ev=click.

SPNHC Announces Changes to Newsletter

As of March 2014, the newsletter of the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections will be published in an electronic format. This will bring greater opportunities for advertising, active linking, sharing via social media, and multimedia capabilities. The newsletter will have an e-book format, with the feel of a magazine, but none of the paper waste or associated costs. It will be optimized for mobile devices as well. Access the newsletter at <http://www.spnhc.org/23/newsletter>.

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.

The NSC Alliance Washington Report is a publication of the NSC Alliance. For information about membership in the NSC Alliance, please contact spotter@aibs.org.