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In this Issue:

- A Look at the President's FY 2015 Budget Request for Research and Development
 - NSF Budget Proposal Would Cut BIO Funding
 - Senate Confirms New Director of NSF
 - Smithsonian Institution Selects 13th Secretary
 - iDigBIO Releases Resources on TCNs
 - Remote Participation for Workshops on Collections Digitization
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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.

A Look at the President's FY 2015 Budget Request for Research and Development

President Obama released his proposed budget for fiscal year (FY) 2015 on 4 March 2014. The new fiscal year begins on 1 October 2014. The plan would provide \$1.014 trillion for discretionary spending, the same level agreed to in the December 2013 Ryan-Murray budget accord.

Most federal science agencies would receive a small budget increase if President Obama's request for fiscal year (FY) 2015 were enacted. The administration proposes \$135.4 billion for federal research and development, an increase of 1.2 percent relative to the FY 2014 enacted level. This is less than the anticipated 1.7 percent increase in inflation, but higher than 0.2 percent increase proposed overall for discretionary spending.

“Earlier this year, thanks to the work of Democrats and Republicans, the Congress produced an agreement that undid some of last year's severe cuts to priorities like education and research, infrastructure, and national security,” said President Obama in his message accompanying the budget. “Recognizing the importance of that bipartisan compromise, the Budget adheres to the spending levels agreed to by the Congress for fiscal year 2015. But there is clearly much more we can and should do to invest in areas like infrastructure, innovation, and education that will create jobs, economic growth, and opportunity. So I am including in my Budget a fully paid for Opportunity, Growth, and Security Initiative that provides the Congress a roadmap for how and where additional investments should be made in both domestic priorities and national security this year.”

The \$56 billion Growth, Opportunity, and Security Initiative would boost spending for defense and non-defense programs beyond what is proposed in the administration's budget request. If enacted, the Initiative would direct \$5.3 billion in additional funds for science and technology, including \$1 billion for a climate resilience fund, \$552 million for the National Science Foundation (NSF), \$970 million for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and additional funding for other federal science programs. The initiative is largely a political statement as Congress is unlikely to support the supplemental request because it exceeds the budget caps that recently gained bipartisan support and the initiative lacks viable budget offsets.

The budget request also seeks to replace sequestration starting in FY 2016 through new spending cuts, added tax revenue, and immigration reform.

The FY 2015 budget includes \$64.7 billion for basic and applied research. This is \$251 million more than the current level.

The White House once again proposed a reorganization of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education. The "fresh" proposal would consolidate some STEM programs within agencies, but would not transfer programs to other agencies, as was proposed and soundly rejected in the FY 2014 budget request. The new plan has five focus areas in STEM education: Pre-K to 12, undergraduate, graduate, broadening participating, and informal education. The proposed total funding of \$2.9 billion for STEM education is a 3.7 percent increase relative to the current total.

A summary of proposed funding for some science agencies follows. All comparisons are to the FY 2014 enacted level.

- Department of Energy Office of Science: \$5.1 billion (+\$45 million)
 - Biological and Environmental Research: \$628 million (+\$18 million)
- Environmental Protection Agency Science and Technology: \$763 million (+\$4.6 million)
- National Institutes of Health: \$30.2 billion (+\$211 million)
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration R&D: \$688 million (+\$27 million)
- National Science Foundation: \$7.3 billion (+\$83 million)
 - Research and Related Activities: \$5.8 billion (-\$1.5 million)
 - Education and Human Resources: \$889 million (+\$43 million)
 - Major Research Equipment and Facilities Construction: \$201 million (+\$0.8 million)
- Smithsonian Institution R&D: \$252 million (+\$20 million)
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
 - Agricultural Research Service: \$1.1 billion (-\$18 million)
 - Agriculture and Food Research Initiative: \$325 (+\$9 million)
- U.S. Forest Service Forest and Rangeland Research: \$275 million (-\$18 million)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: \$1.3 billion (+\$72 million)
- U.S. Geological Survey: \$1.1 billion (+\$41 million)
 - Ecosystems Activity: \$162 million (+\$9 million)

A more detailed analysis of the budget will be released in a forthcoming report by the American Institute of Biological Sciences.

NSF Budget Proposal Would Cut BIO Funding

President Obama's budget request for fiscal year (FY) 2015 requests \$7.255 billion for the National Science Foundation (NSF). This is a proposed increase of \$83.1 million, or 1.2 percent over the FY 2014 appropriation.

The proposed funding increase would be directed to education activities and for agency operations. Each of these budget accounts would increase by about \$40 million, resulting in a 5.1 percent increase for Education and Human Resources and a 13.5 percent increase for Agency Operations and Award Management. Funding for the Research and Related Activities account, which includes funding for the various disciplinary directorates, would be cut by \$1.5 million, resulting in \$5.8 billion for research. The agency's funding rate for grants is expected to remain at 22 percent. Major Research Equipment and Facilities Construction would also remain essentially flat; \$96.0 million is proposed for the continued construction of the National Ecological Observatory Network.

The proposed \$12.8 million reduction for Biological Sciences Directorate (BIO) is the largest cut among all of NSF's directorates. Two other directorates are facing cuts on the order of 0.1 to 0.3 percent. Three directorates would receive increases of 0.1 to 6.0 percent. BIO provides about 66 percent of federal funding for non-medical, basic life sciences research, including environmental biology, at academic institutions.

Within BIO, three major activities are emphasized: 1) increased investment in basic research on understanding the neural circuitry and activity that underlie cognition, behavior, and thoughts; 2) continued investment in the Biological, Mathematical, and Physical Sciences (BioMaPS) program, which seeks to discover fundamental quantitative knowledge at the intersections of biology, math, the physical sciences, and engineering; and 3) support for cyberinfrastructure and other BIO infrastructure, such as NEON, digitization of biological collections, field stations, and synthesis centers.

The number of BIO research grants awarded would increase slightly from the FY 2014 level, although median award size is projected to remain the same at \$185,000 per year. The funding rate across the BIO directorate is expected to decrease from 22 percent to 21 percent.

NSF would continue its support for graduate students. The Graduate Research Fellowship program would award 2,000 new fellowships—700 fewer fellowships than the agency had hoped to award last year. The stipend level would increase from \$32,000 to \$34,000. NSF Research Traineeships would continue for a second year; funding would be included to support continuing grants for the program it replaced, the Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship (IGERT).

Senate Confirms New Director of NSF

France Anne Cordova, Ph.D. was confirmed by the U.S. Senate as the new director of the National Science Foundation (NSF) on 12 March 2014. She is the second woman and the first Latina to lead the agency. Cordova is an astrophysicist by training. She is a former president of Purdue University and previously served as chancellor of the University of California, Riverside. Cordova also served as NASA's Chief Scientist and worked at Los Alamos National Laboratory. She chaired the Smithsonian Institution's Board of Regents and was a member of the National Science Board. The last director of NSF, Dr. Subra Suresh, left in 2013 to serve as president of Carnegie Mellon University.

Smithsonian Institution Selects 13th Secretary

On 10 March, the Smithsonian Institution selected Dr. David J. Skorton to be the 13th Secretary of the Smithsonian. Skorton will succeed the retiring G. Wayne Clough. Similar to Clough, who had served as the president of the Georgia Institute of Technology, Skorton spent nearly eleven years as a college president, first at the University of Iowa and later at Cornell University. Skorton is a board-certified cardiologist, and will be the first physician to lead the Smithsonian.

“Becoming a part of the Smithsonian is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to lead an institution that is at the heart of the country's cultural, artistic, historical and scientific life,” Skorton said.

Clough will retire at the end of 2014. Skorton will start in July 2015.

iDigBio Releases Resources on TCNs

The NSF-funded iDigBio has released information that provides an at-a-glance introduction to existing Thematic Collections Networks (TCNs) that are working to digitize collections. The information includes a volunteer contact for each TCN and some information about the types of specimens that will be digitized. This information may be useful to anyone writing a proposal, or who has recently received funding and is looking for tips and advice. Learn more at https://www.idigbio.org/wiki/index.php/TCN_Resources.

Remote Participation for Workshops on Collections Digitization

On 25-27 March, iDigBio will host a workshop on “Biological Collections Digitization in the Pacific.” Remote participation via Adobe Connect is free and does not require registration. For more information about the workshop, visit <https://www.idigbio.org/wiki/index.php/PacificDigitization>.

An iDigBio workshop on digitization of small collections will be held on 7-10 April. Remote participation is also free. Learn more at https://www.idigbio.org/wiki/index.php/Small_Collections.

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.