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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.

OSTP Issues Directives on Scientific Collections

In March 2014, President Obama's science advisor directed federal agencies to develop policies to improve the management of and access to scientific collections that are owned, directly managed, or financially supported by the federal government.

Notably, agencies will be required to improve public access to collections. Agencies are to work with the Smithsonian Institution to ensure that information on the contents of the collection is available in a central online clearinghouse. Several other directives deal with budgeting for collection care, including outlining procedures for supporting new scientific collections.

Agencies will also be required to describe how they will apply their policy to collections managed by a third party.

In regards to de-accessioning collections, agencies must give preference to transferring collections to other federal agencies or non-federal institutions that will "continue to make the collections and information about the collections accessible for research and education." Agencies will have to develop standards for de-accessioning and review the value of a collection to science, education, and resource management. Prior to de-accession, an agency must consult with researchers who have used the collection and external parties interested in using the

collection for research, resource management, or education.

The new guidelines were developed by the Interagency Working Group on Scientific Collections. Agencies will have six months to comply with the new requirements. The policy only applies to “assets with long-term scientific value,” not “materials assembled specifically for short-term use... and not intended for long-term preservation.”

Congress directed the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) in a 2010 law to develop “policies for the management and use of Federal scientific collections to improve the quality, organization, access, including online access, and long-term preservation of such collections for the benefit of the scientific enterprise.” The memo by Dr. John Holdren fulfills this requirement.

The new memo builds upon a 2010 directive, in which Holdren required federal agencies to budget realistically for proper care of collections, to develop best practices for maintaining and preserving scientific collections, and to make collections more accessible to the public.

NSC Alliance Testimony Supports Increased Funding for NSF

The Natural Science Collections Alliance provided testimony to Congress in favor of increased funding for the National Science Foundation (NSF). The requested \$7.5 billion would restore proposed cuts to research funding and enable continued investments in natural history collections.

NSF requested \$7.255 billion in fiscal year 2015. At this level, biological research funding would be cut by \$12.75 million, although significant new investments would be made in science education.

Congress is currently considering funding levels for the next fiscal year, which will start on 1 October 2014.

Read the NSC Alliance testimony at <http://nscalliance.org/?p=721>.

NSC Alliance Policy Director Testifies Before House Appropriations Panel

On 10 April 2014, the NSC Alliance director of public policy Dr. Robert Gropp was a witness on a panel offering testimony before the House Subcommittee on Interior and Environment Appropriations. He testified in his capacity as Chairman of the USGS Coalition, an alliance of organizations united by a commitment to the continued vitality of the United States Geological Survey. The NSC Alliance is a member of the coalition.

Gropp made a case for a fiscal year 2015 appropriation of \$1.2 billion for the USGS, a level just over \$100 million above that requested by the Administration. He noted, among other things, that restoring proposed cuts and providing \$75 million in new funding would allow the Survey to sustain efforts in bio-science data projects, enable USGS scientists to more fully engage with

their professional communities through participation in scientific meetings, support new research on wildlife and ecosystems, and sustain long-term environmental monitoring efforts.

Representative Simpson (R-ID) shared his concern that the USGS receive adequate funding to sustain long-term monitoring, specifically referencing the importance of stream gauge data. Mapping and combating invasive species were other issues raised by Subcommittee members. The Subcommittee also discussed bipartisan legislation introduced by Representative Simpson that would change the way the government funds efforts to combat wildfires. It is increasingly common that the government has an inadequate budget to cover firefighting costs. As a result, money is often reprogrammed from discretionary accounts, such as research, to cover fire expenses.

Report Analyzes Science Funding in President Obama's Budget Request

A report from the American Institute of Biological Sciences analyzes funding for biological research in President Obama's budget request for fiscal year 2015. Most federal agencies would receive a small budget increase, but less than the rate of inflation, if the spending plan were enacted by Congress. The report provides detailed breakdowns of funding for the National Science Foundation, Smithsonian Institution, and other agencies. Download a free copy of the report at www.aibs.org/public-policy/budget_report.html.

USGS Develops New DNA Tool to Identify Invasive Plants

Researchers at the United States Geological Survey (USGS) have developed a new DNA protocol to distinguish between native and invasive aquatic plant species that have almost identical appearances. The tool was created using voucher plant specimens.

“When invasive plants appear in a body of water, local people naturally are alarmed,” said Nancy Rybicki, a USGS biologist who worked on the team that developed the new testing technique. “Enormous amounts of money are spent on control. Some species may look very nearly identical, but they have unique reproductive and growth characteristics. Identification, the first step for control or eradication, needs to be precise.”

The tool will be used to combat invasive hydrilla in the Potomac River near Washington, DC.

NSF to Host Google+ Hangout on Biodiversity

The National Science Foundation will host an online hangout about the benefits of biodiversity and how researchers are measuring biodiversity in a changing environment. The hangout will be held on 17 April 2014 at 3 pm EDT. An archived version will be posted on YouTube after the event. Learn more at

http://www.nsf.gov/news/news_summ.jsp?cntn_id=131057&WT.mc_id=USNSF_51&WT.mc_ev=click.

NSCA Welcomes New Members: SUNY-ESF and iDigBio

The Natural Science Collections Alliance is pleased to announce two new members. In the past month, the [State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry](#) and [iDigBio](#) joined the Alliance. If your organization is not yet a member, please contact Larry Page, NSCA President, or Robert Gropp, NSCA director of policy, to learn how your participation in NSCA helps advance science and the shared interests of the natural science collections community. You can also learn more about NSCA by visiting www.nscalliance.org.

Call for Abstracts on University Museum Challenges

The Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections will hold a session on 'University Museum Challenges' at their upcoming conference. Abstracts are now being accepted on topics that explore challenges unique to university museums. Learn more at <http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/spnhc2014/submissions/>.

Upcoming NSC Alliance and iDigBio Symposium

The Natural Science Collections Alliance and iDigBio will hold a symposium on the future of collections on 5-6 May 2014 at the University of Florida. This important program will emphasize the value of collections and address questions relevant to the national digitization effort. Learn more at <http://nscalliance.org/?p=719>.

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.