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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. Anyone interested in receiving copies of the NSC Alliance Washington Report may subscribe at www.NSCAlliance.org -- it's free!**

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 is Core Participant in New National Initiative

On 20 August 2014, the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS), NSC Alliance, and Society for Preservation of Natural History Collections (SPNHC) announced the launch of a new national initiative to build a research and end-user community dedicated to developing a [Network Integrated Biocollections Alliance](#) (NIBA). The project is an outgrowth of recent scientific meetings in which scientists have articulated a need to digitally capture biological specimens and associated data held in natural science collections for use in research, education, and for the public interest.

The project, *Organizing, Coordinating, and Sustaining a Network Integrated Biocollections Alliance*, is supported by a five-year grant from the [National Science Foundation](#) (NSF) to the AIBS.

Initial partner organizations are AIBS, SPNHC, and NSC Alliance. The project is also

coordinating with [iDigBio](#), the national digitization initiative led by the University of Florida and Florida State University.

An advisory committee will be established in the coming weeks. This group will then develop plans for engaging with the wider scientific community in the work of this project.

Please visit www.niballiance.org to learn more and to receive project updates, including information about opportunities to participate in the project.

Collections, Biology, Earth Observation Highlights of White House Budget Memo

The White House released a memorandum on 18 July 2014 detailing budget priorities for science and technology in the fiscal year (FY) 2016 federal budget, which agencies are now developing. The annual memo from the Office of Management and Budget and Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) directs departments and agencies to prioritize certain areas of research in their budget submissions.

“In the FY 2016 Budget, agencies should balance priorities to ensure resources are adequately allocated for agency-specific, mission-driven research, including fundamental research, while focusing resources, where appropriate, on the following multi-agency research activities that cannot be addressed effectively by a single agency.”

Among the multi-agency priorities are climate change, earth observation, high-performance computing, and research and development for informed policy-making and management. Notably, innovation in life sciences, biology, and neuroscience continues to be a priority. “Agencies should give priority to programs that support fundamental biological discovery research that could generate unexpected, high-impact scientific and technological advances in health, energy, and food security,” stated the memo.

The Administration’s BRAIN Initiative and “National Bioeconomy Blueprint” are listed as sources for ideas for research initiatives in biology. Additionally, the White House would like to see greater emphasis on addressing antibiotic resistance.

Consistent with the White House budget memos released in recent years, the preservation of and access to scientific collections continues to be prioritized. OSTP released a memo in March 2014 on the management of federal scientific collections.

The complete memo is available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/2014/m-14-11.pdf>.

Scientific Organizations Express Concerns with Conference Restrictions

A group of 70 scientific organizations, including the NSC Alliance, have expressed concerns with a bill pending in the U.S. Senate that would further restrict the ability of federal employees

to attend conferences.

In a letter sent to members of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, the organizations stated, “The Coburn-Heitkamp substitute to S. 1347, Conference Accountability Act of 2013 would raise existing barriers and perpetuate unintended negative consequences the Administration’s regulations have already imposed on our scientific enterprise and national competitiveness.”

Existing regulations on conferences have resulted in decreased attendance by federal employees and contractors at scientific and technical conferences. Several scientific meetings were canceled in 2013 as a result. The pending bill would likely further diminish turnout.

S. 1347 was approved by the Homeland Security Committee on 30 July 2014.

Read the letter at <http://nscalliance.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/conference-restrictions-group-letter-7292014.pdf>.

Upcoming Survey on Collections Conditions

This fall, the Heritage Health Information (HHI) 2014 survey will assess the state of the nation’s collections held by archives, libraries, historical societies, museums, scientific research collections, and archaeological repositories. The results of the survey will be used to recommend next steps in collections preservation. The Natural Science Collections Alliance is an allied partner in the effort.

About 14,000 institutions that house collections will be invited to participate in the survey, which is administered by Heritage Preservation in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the National Endowment for the Arts. HHI 2014 will build upon a 2004 report. The survey will also provide an opportunity to assess progress in the field over the last ten years through collecting comparable data—with a new emphasis on digital collections.

The first survey, conducted in 2004, and subsequent report, *A Public Trust at Risk: The Heritage Health Index Report on the State of America’s Collections*, shed light on the condition of the more than 4.8 billion artifacts held by more than 30,000 U.S. collecting institutions. The report discovered that immediate action was needed to prevent the loss of nearly 190 million artifacts. The report was the catalyst for extensive new funding in preservation including the IMLS initiative Connecting to Collections.

More information about HHI 2014 is available at <http://www.heritagepreservation.org/HHI/>.

AIBS to Convene Meeting of Journal Editors, Science Leaders to Discuss Public Access to Data

The American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) will convene a meeting of scientific society leaders, scientific journal editors, scientists, and government officials in Washington, DC, on 3 December 2014 to facilitate a discussion of issues related to increasing public access to scientific data. The daylong meeting is supported in part by a grant from the National Science Foundation.

"We are pleased to have this opportunity to foster an important conversation among scientific societies and journal editors," said Dr. Timothy Beardsley, Editorial Director for AIBS and Editor-in-Chief of the journal *BioScience*.

"Data are the currency of science," said Dr. Richard O'Grady, Executive Director of AIBS. "The ability to find and share data makes it possible for scientists to validate research findings and also to ask and answer new questions; many of which were out of reach just a few years ago. This is an exciting time for science."

Practical challenges and a lack of shared standards of practice for reporting and archiving data remain. "This meeting is an opportunity for core stakeholders to come together to start a discussion about common interests," said Beardsley.

AIBS looks forward to having the broad participation of its 150 member organizations and other interested stakeholders. More information about this meeting will be made available at www.aibs.org. Journal editors or scientific society representatives interested in participating in this meeting should send an email to tbeardsley@aibs.org.

IMLS Accepting Nominations for National Medal for Museum and Library Services

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is accepting nominations for the National Medal for Museum and Library Services. The award recognizes museums and libraries that have made extraordinary contributions to their communities. All types of nonprofit libraries and museums are eligible to receive the award. Anyone is free to make nominations, and self-nominations are accepted. Nomination forms are due by 15 October 2014.

Approximately 30 finalists will be selected and featured by IMLS as part of a social media and press campaign building to the announcement of the winners. The winners will be honored at a ceremony in Washington, DC, and will be given the opportunity to host a two-day visit from StoryCorps to record community member stories.

The nomination form and instructions can be found at <http://www.ims.gov/applicants/detail.aspx?GrantId=13>.

New Species Discovered in Amber Collection

A piece of amber collected 50 years ago has yielded a species that was previously unknown to science. A new species of cricket from 20 million years ago was preserved in the amber.

As reported by the Washington Post, the amber was collected in the 1950's and sat in a lab at the Illinois Natural History Survey until recently. Researchers have been examining the amber and expect to find other new discoveries.

“You don't have to go out into the jungle to make discoveries,” said paleontologist Sam Heads. “You can make them in a museum, and that's what we're doing here every day.”

Hackathon to Address Biocollections Digitization

A hackathon will be held later this year to improve digitization of biological collections. The event is organized by iDigBio and Zooniverse's Notes from Nature Project. The goal of the hackathon is to build interoperability among projects thus further enabling public participation in biocollections digitization in useful and exciting ways.

The event will occur from 3-5 December 2014 in Gainesville, Florida. Up to \$1,500 for support of travel, lodging, and meals is available for each participant.

Two or more development tracks will be identified by hackathon participants during one or more remote meetings prior to the hackathon. These tracks could involve (1) innovative cross-platform ways to deploy and manage public participation projects, (2) services for data analysis and visualization to engage the public or inform project management, (3) novel ways to advertise and grow public participation projects, or (4) ingestion of crowd sourced data into biodiversity collection data management systems.

Applications are currently being accepted for five to seven open participants. Please send (1) your CV/resume, (2) a short description (less than 250 words) of your relevant expertise (citing example products where appropriate), (3) a short description of the functionality that you'd like to develop in this domain, and (4) the days that you can attend to Austin Mast (amast@bio.fsu.edu) by 1 September. Qualified graduate students and postdoctoral scholars are encouraged to apply.

Webinar on Integrating State Early Childhood Learning Activities into Museums

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and the BUILD Initiative recently held a webinar to provide an overview of state early childhood learning systems and to discuss ways for libraries and museums to align their activities with these systems. Audio and the power point from the webinar are available at

<http://www.buildinitiative.org/OurWork/StateandLocal/BUILDIMLSPartnership.aspx>.

This webinar is the third in a collaborative series by IMLS and BUILD seeking to create connections between museums, libraries, and early childhood systems builders in order to enhance growth and development programs for children for birth to age eight.

Flora of North America Announces Publication Sale of New Volume

Flora of North America News has announced that a new installment of the *Flora of North America North of Mexico* series will be published this month. Oxford University Press will be offering a 20 percent discount on *Flora of North America, Volume 28: Bryophyta, Part 2* at www.oup.com with PROMO CODE 33009. The new volume will cover 698 species in 206 genera and 48 families, including descriptions, literature citations, geographic distributions, discussions, and identification keys.

Volumes 9, 6, and 12 are expected to be released over the next several months. All families and genera contained in these volumes can be found at <http://www.floranorthamerica.org>.

AAM President Ford Bell to Retire in May 2015

On 19 August 2014, Ford W. Bell announced he will retire from the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) on 31 May 2015. Bell has led AAM through a re-branding that included a comprehensive overhaul of its programs and membership structure; a complete organizational restructuring; and a new, intense focus on advocacy.

Bell became AAM president in June 2007, following a career as a veterinarian and non-profit executive. He has also served as chair of the board of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and was a longtime board member of the Bell Museum of Natural History at the University of Minnesota. AAM board chair Kaywin Feldman will lead a search committee to find Bell's successor.

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.