

In this Issue:

- Budget Deal Will Provide Sequester Reprieve
 - NSC Alliance to Brief Congress in December
 - NSC Alliance Nominee to be Reappointed to NAGPRA Review Committee
 - Illinois Legislature Passes Bill that Would Reopen State Museum
 - WeDigBio Holds Successful Global Volunteer Event
 - Report Identifies Framework for Effective Out-of-School STEM Learning
 - Notice of Availability of Request for Information – Bioarchive Services
 - Comments Sought on NAGPRA Information Collection
 - Digitization Efforts Highlighted in the News
 - DNA Analysis Reveals Origins of Birds
-

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.

Budget Deal Will Provide Sequester Reprieve

In early November, lawmakers approved a plan to raise federal budget caps that have been limiting federal spending for three years. The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015, the last legislative achievement of former House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH), passed the House of Representatives with the support of all Democrats and 79 Republicans. The Senate approved the legislation with a vote of 64 to 35; all of the dissenting votes were cast by Republican Senators.

The measure will have a large impact on non-defense discretionary spending in the next two years. It eliminates 90 percent of budget cuts that would have occurred in fiscal year 2016 as a result of sequestration; in 2017, 60 percent of cuts will be avoided.

In total, the bill will provide Congress and the President with the authority to allocate an additional \$80 billion over two years. The increased authorizations will be equally divided between defense and non-defense programs. The funding will be frontloaded in 2016 as compared to 2017, with an additional \$25 billion going to non-defense programs this year and an additional \$15 billion in 2017. The deal does not address sequestration in 2018 or beyond.

The new deal is not a guarantee that funding will be increased for research programs, but it provides Congress with greater flexibility to fund national priorities.

The House and Senate are now working to update allocations for the 12 spending bills that collectively fund the federal government. Work on fiscal year 2016 appropriations must be completed by 11 December, when the current funding bill expires.

NSC Alliance to Brief Congress in December

The NSC Alliance will convene a science briefing for members of Congress on 14 December 2015. The briefing will showcase how efforts to digitize natural science collections are driving scientific innovation, increasing scientific and public access to collections and specimen-related data, and how digitization initiatives are providing new opportunities to engage the public and increase STEM literacy.

Speakers participating in the briefing are Larry Page, President of NSC Alliance; Barbara Thiers, Vice President of Science, New York Botanical Garden; and Austin Mast, Florida State University and WeDigBio.

Any NSC Alliance members in Washington, DC on December 14th are welcome to attend this briefing, but registration is required. Please contact rgropp@aibs.org if you are interested in attending.

The NSC Alliance Board of Directors will meet in Washington, DC on 15 December.

NSC Alliance Nominee to be Reappointed to NAGPRA Review Committee

The U.S. Secretary of the Interior will reappoint LindaLee (Cissy) Farm to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Review Committee. Ms. Farm was originally nominated to the committee by the NSC Alliance. She has served on the committee since 2011 and served as chair from 2013 to 2015. Ms. Farm is a partner at Goodsill Anderson Quinn & Stifel, LLP, a law firm in Hawaii.

The committee monitors, reviews, and assists in the implementation of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).

Illinois Legislature Passes Bill that Would Reopen State Museum

On 10 November, the Illinois House of Representatives passed a bill that would require the state government to operate an Illinois State Museum. SB 317 passed the Senate in August.

The bill's sponsors hope that the legislation will force Governor Bruce Rauner (R) to reopen the museum, which closed its doors to the public at the end of September. The museum was shuttered because of a budget impasse and significant deficits in the state.

The Governor's office is reviewing the legislation, which passed with enough votes to override a veto. Even if SB 317 becomes law, the Rauner Administration would not be forced to reopen the museum, as the bill does not provide funding to operate the museum.

The museum is at risk of losing its accreditation because of the closure.

"The actions by the Illinois state government that forced the Illinois State Museum system to close to the public left us no choice but to place this museum on probation pending further information from the museum system," said Burt Logan, who chairs the American Alliance of Museums' Accreditation Commission.

Earlier this year, the NSC Alliance was among numerous national organizations to urge the Governor to reverse course and keep the museum open.

WeDigBio Holds Successful Global Volunteer Event

In late October, Worldwide Engagement for Digitizing Biocollections (WeDigBio) held an event that encouraged people around the globe to participate in the transcription of biodiversity research collections. Projects ranged from transcribing field notes from a bivalve expedition held by the Museum Victoria Archives to recording handwritten information associated with plant specimens into a digital form for the Smithsonian Institution. Hundreds of volunteers participated and collectively completed more than 30,000 transcriptions.

Report Identifies Framework for Effective Out-of-School STEM Learning

A recent report from the National Academies Committee on Successful Out-of-School STEM Learning draws upon a large body of research to evaluate the effectiveness of out-of-school science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education programs. The report finds that informal education opportunities are successful at generating interest in science, connecting youth with STEM role models, and reducing achievement gaps between socio-economic groups.

The report identifies hallmarks of a successful program, including being engaging and responsive, and making connections between programs, resources, and additional learning opportunities. It also examines ongoing progress in developing tools to evaluate program effectiveness.

Museums, universities, and other public serving institutions are among those highlighted as providing model programs and as places with potential to grow community engagement and learning experiences as part of a "STEM learning ecosystem."

One of the studies the report reviewed found that STEM education “outcomes for participants were optimized when teachers and museum professionals collaboratively designed coursework that incorporated the instructional practices and instruments of both learning environments.”

The Urban Advantage Program in New York City was highlighted as an example of creating partnerships between the public school system and city museums, zoos, and other science institutions to create a STEM learning ecosystem. Portland, Oregon has a similar project called SYNERGIES, which brings many educational and youth programs and institutions including universities and museums together to provide improved STEM education opportunities to low to moderate income students in a under-resourced neighborhood.

The full report can be found at <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/21740/identifying-and-supporting-productive-stem-programs-in-out-of-school-settings>.

Notice of Availability of Request for Information – Bioarchive Services

The National Ecological Observatory Network (NEON) has issued a Request for Information to determine the interest of organizations, institutions, collaborations, and consortia in providing museum services in support of the NEON mission.

NEON is a large facility project funded by the National Science Foundation.

Throughout the 30 year life of the NEON observatory, a range of biological and physical samples and specimens will be collected from terrestrial and aquatic systems including insects, small mammals, fish, flora, soils, as well as wet and dry deposition. These samples (collectively, the NEON Bioarchive) will require cataloging, curation, and long-term storage. For more information on NEON and its mission, please visit www.neoninc.org.

Notices of Intent to Submit are due 20 November 2015 and submissions are due 17 February 2016. All interested and qualified parties are encouraged to provide a submission. The full request for information provides additional information and is available from the NEON Contracts Administrator, Steve McCormick at (720) 330-1668 or smccormick@neoninc.org.

Comments Sought on NAGPRA Information Collection

The National Park Service is seeking public input on an existing information collection. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) requires museums to compile certain information on Native American cultural items in their possession. These summaries, notices, and inventories take approximately 6,000 hours annually for museums to complete.

Comments are being accepted on whether or not the collection of information is necessary and on ways to enhance the utility of information collected. Comments are due by 7 December 2015. Learn more at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2015-11-06/html/2015-28318.htm>.

Digitization Efforts Highlighted in the News

A recent article in the New York Times highlights the efforts of natural history collections to make their specimens and associated data available online.

“Everybody knows there’s a tremendous amount of information in natural history collections,” Larry Page told the newspaper. Dr. Page is the president of NSC Alliance, the director of iDigBio, and a curator at the Florida Museum of Natural History. “But the collections are inaccessible to virtually everyone. Even scientists working on particular groups of organisms don’t know what’s contained in the other museums.”

“This is one way of documenting what we are about to lose,” said Quentin Wheeler. Wheeler is president of the College of Environmental Science and Forestry at the State University of New York and a former NSC Alliance board member. Digitization will reveal “irreplaceable clues needed to reconstruct evolutionary history, to understand where we and all the other species came from.”

Read the full article at <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/20/science/putting-museums-samples-of-life-on-the-internet.html>.

DNA Analysis Reveals Origins of Birds

A new technique for analyzing DNA has resulted in the construction of the first complete family tree for birds. Researchers discovered that all birds evolved from a group of dinosaurs and that more than 10,000 bird species evolved within a few million years after the extinction of dinosaurs. A study describing the discovery was published in the journal *Nature*.

The authors of the study include researchers from Florida State University, Yale University, Cornell University, and North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences; the latter three institutions are members of NSC Alliance.

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.