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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.

President Obama Proposes New Funding for Science in His Final Budget

On 9 February 2016, President Obama released his proposed budget for fiscal year (FY) 2017. Although the plan adheres to the \$1.07 trillion cap for discretionary spending that was enacted into law in late 2015, the president's budget request proposes a significant amount of new mandatory spending. The White House is seeking mandatory spending for agencies and programs that have not historically been funded by the budget mechanism. Mandatory spending has traditionally been reserved for such programs as Social Security and Medicare. The proposal to fund science programs, in part, via mandatory spending is intended to provide a mechanism to bypass existing budget caps.

Most federal science agencies would receive a budget increase if the president's budget plan were enacted. The administration proposes \$152 billion for federal research and development, a \$6 billion increase (+\$4 billion in mandatory spending, +\$2 billion in discretionary spending).

The president proposes to ramp up investments for several of his priorities, including clean energy, neuroscience, climate science, and water research. Notably, several agencies propose to use new mandatory funding to support increases for extramural research grants, including the National Science Foundation, Department of Energy, and Department of Agriculture.

Proposed discretionary funding levels for select agencies:

- National Science Foundation request: \$7.6 billion (+\$100.5 million)
 - Additional \$400.0 million in new mandatory spending proposed
 - Biological Sciences Directorate request: \$745.7 million (+\$1.6 million)
 - Additional \$44.8 million in new mandatory spending proposed
- Department of Energy Office of Science request: \$5.6 billion (+\$225.1 million)
 - Additional \$100.0 million in new mandatory spending proposed
 - Biological and Environmental Research request: \$661.9 million (+\$52.9 million)
- National Institutes of Health request: \$30.3 billion (-\$1.1 billion)
 - Additional \$1.8 billion in new mandatory spending proposed
- Department of Agriculture Research, Education, and Economics request: \$2.9 billion (-\$37.0 million)
 - Additional \$325.0 million in new mandatory spending proposed
- Smithsonian Institution request: \$922.2 million (+\$82.0 million)
- U.S. Geological Survey Ecosystems Activity request: \$173.9 million (+\$13.7 million)

Read a full analysis of the president's budget request prepared by the American Institute of Biological Sciences at www.aibs.org/public-policy/budget_report.html.

Illinois State Museum Could Reopen

Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner (R) has announced a plan to reopen the state museum system, which was shuttered in September 2015 due to a budget impasse with the state legislature. The governor proposes to reopen four of the six museum sites and to start charging admission for the previously free museum.

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources claims the changes would save about \$1 million per year. In 2015, the governor's office claimed the closure of all six sites would save \$6 million annually.

The Illinois Senate and House had passed legislation last fall to attempt to reopen the museum. Through the use of an amendatory veto, Governor Rauner is offering his own recommendations on the legislation. The legislature can either approve the changes or could override the changes with at least 60 percent of votes in each chamber.

Participate in WeDigBio 2016

Institutions that house biodiversity collections are encouraged to participate in the Worldwide Engagement for Digitizing Biocollections Event. The event encourages citizen scientists and the public to assist in the digitization of natural history collections. Organizations can post images of specimens with their labels on partner transcription platforms for transcription or host an on-site transcription event.

During its second year, WeDigBio 2016 aims to expand its reach. In 2015, thousands of citizen scientists from more than 50 countries transcribed specimen labels. This year, WeDigBio is expanding to include more onsite events and participants, more online participants from new parts of the world, and resources to help make the event even more fun, educational, and productive.

Learn more at <https://www.wedigbio.org/>.

Survey on Outliers in Biodiversity Collections

iDigBio's Outlier Detection and Documentation by Collectors Working Group is conducting a survey related to your experience with "outliers" (or "anomalies" or "oddities") in biodiversity collections. For this survey, outliers are defined as individual specimens that differ from a previously documented or perceived general norm within a taxon in any biological characteristic such as morphology, anatomy, distribution, behavior, phenology, or ecology.

Responses will be anonymous. Responses are requested by 22 March 2016.

https://ufl.qualtrics.com/jfe1/form/SV_e2nOw1VWI25Rn2B

National Park Service Works with Google to Expand Public Access to Artifacts

Google's Cultural Institute is partnering with the National Park Service to showcase culturally significant artifacts. The website provides high-resolution images of artifacts, documents, and photos. More than 3,800 federal objects are on display on the site.

The website also features art and objects from museum collections around the world.

Learn more at <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/home>.

Save the Date: "Stressors and Drivers of Food Security: Evidence from Scientific Collections"

The "Stressors and Drivers of Food Security: Evidence from Scientific Collections" symposium will be held on 18-20 May 2016. This will be the first-ever symposium that brings together food security researchers and experts on scientific collections in diverse research disciplines. The symposium will be an ambitious look forward into food security research that relies on evidence drawn from scientific across a broad range of disciplines.

The symposium prospectus and preliminary agenda can be found at <https://goo.gl/V9I5pL>.

Participation will be limited to 100 and attendees will be selected to ensure a productive mixture of:

- Researchers using diverse approaches to basic and applied research on food security and insecurity; and
- Representatives of scientific collections in anthropology, archaeology, biomedicine, biodiversity, ecology, ethnobiology, geology, paleontology, parasitology, veterinary sciences, and others.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture will host the symposium at the National Agriculture Library in Beltsville, Maryland on Wednesday to Friday, 18-20 May 2016. The symposium is organized by Scientific Collections International.

The keynote speakers will be:

- Dr. Ann Bartuska, Deputy Under Secretary for Research, Education & Economics, US Department of Agriculture, an ecosystems ecologist and USDA representative to the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES);
- Dr. Vera Lucia Imperatriz-Fonseca, a pollination biologist at the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, and Co-Chair of the IPBES Experts for thematic assessment of pollinators, pollination and food production; and
- Dr. Gary Nabhan, an ethnobiologist, agroecologist, conservation biologist, cultural geographer, and W.K. Kellogg Chair in Southwest Borderlands Food and Water Security at the University of Arizona.

Express your interest in participating at <http://goo.gl/forms/IFzsKjVJjx>.

Bell Museum Seeks New Executive Director

The University of Minnesota seeks an Executive Director who will oversee the Bell Museum of Natural History and Planetarium's mission through its personnel, research/programs, and facilities. The museum's mission is to ignite curiosity and wonder, explore our connections to nature and the universe, and create a better future for our evolving world.

For more information, see the job description at <http://nscalliance.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/bmnhp-execdir-pd-121.pdf>.

***The Atlantic* Explores Museum Collections**

A recent article in *The Atlantic* highlights the important role of natural history collections as a place of discovery. "Natural History Museums Are Teeming With Undiscovered Species" features the tales of researchers who have identified new species using specimens that were previously collected.

Dr. Evon Hekkala collected DNA from museum specimens of Nile crocodiles to discover that the species was actually two distinct species.

“I’m trying to create an army of young scientists who want to work with collections, and who will go through material like this,” says Hekkala. “I love that people are going on expeditions but we can do that in the drawers of museums.”

The article captures the wonder of what may be lurking under our noses and the valuable of this information. “Museum collections, then, are windows not just into the hidden diversity of today, but the lost diversity of yesterday.”

Read the article for free at <http://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2016/02/the-unexplored-marvels-locked-away-in-our-natural-history-museums/459306/>.

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.