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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.

New Benefit for NSC Alliance Members

NSC Alliance members have the opportunity to participate in a new communications training program for scientists.

Last fall, the Biodiversity Collections Network (BCoN) – a collaborative project initiated by the American Institute of Biological Sciences, NSC Alliance, and the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections – hosted a workshop to explore how the biodiversity collections community can more effectively communicate with decision-makers. Among the issues identified by workshop participants is the need for collections affiliated scientists to become more skilled at communicating with non-technical audiences.

The American Institute of Biological Sciences is responding to this recommendation by offering a new Communications Boot Camp for Scientists. This intensive, two-day professional development program is ideal for graduate students, early career professionals, senior researchers, curators, collection managers, as well as organizational leaders and individuals who wish to become leaders.

The Communications Boot Camp will prepare participants to:

- Translate scientific findings for non-technical audiences

- Tell a resonant story that informs decision-makers
- Prepare for and participate in a news interview, including broadcast interviews
- Prepare for and engage in a meeting with a decision-maker
- Protect your scientific reputation
- Identify and define the audience you need to reach
- Understand what policymakers want and need to know from a scientist
- Understand what reporters are looking for in an interview
- Understand how the nation's science policy is developed and implemented

Because of NSC Alliance's strategic partnership with the American Institute of Biological Sciences, individuals nominated to participate by an NSC Alliance member institution are able to register at the reduced AIBS member rate.

Detailed information about this great new program is available at https://www.aibs.org/public-policy/communications_boot_camp.html.

Smithsonian, IMLS Funding Bills Advancing in Congress

The Smithsonian Institution is among a handful of agencies that could receive a funding increase in fiscal year 2017, which starts on October 1, 2016. The House of Representatives passed legislation to fund the institution's operations at \$696.1 million, an increase of \$16.4 million.

In the committee report accompanying H.R. 5538, lawmakers called out the "longstanding commitment to the preservation of priceless, irreplaceable Smithsonian Institution collections...The Committee is pleased by continuing efforts to improve the long-term inventory, preservation, and storage of historical collections." The bill provides \$1.5 million in new funding to address collections management deficiencies identified by the Smithsonian's Inspector General.

It is unclear if new funding requested for digitization of collections and hiring additional curators was funded. Given that the House legislation provided \$46.7 million less than President Obama requested for Smithsonian, some new initiatives will not be funded this year.

The Senate version of the bill passed the Senate Appropriations Committee in June. It would provide an even larger increase than the House bill for Smithsonian's operating expenses and salaries (+\$22.0 million). Lawmakers say there is enough funding to support the additional collections staff hired in fiscal year 2016.

The House and Senate are both considering legislation to fund the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) in fiscal year 2017. The House bill would flat fund IMLS as well as all museum related programs within the agency. Conversely, the Senate proposes a \$1 million increase for IMLS and an additional \$1.4 for the National Leadership Grants for Museums program, which supports collections stewardship, and informal education. This increase would be partly paid for by a \$0.8 million cut to the Museums for America program.

The Importance of Entomological Collections

According to a position statement issued by the Entomological Society of America, entomological collections and the staff that maintain them are “an irreplaceable historical reference” and are “of vital importance to current and future life scientists.” The statement, issued in January 2016, calls for the protection of “these irreplaceable resources, upon which the bulk of our scientific knowledge relies.”

Approximately 500 million entomological collections are preserved in the United States and Canada. Such specimens allow rapid identification of invasive pests, are used in research, and aid biodiversity conservation efforts.

“Despite these many contributions, funding cuts, collections staff reductions, and insufficient training of future taxonomists endanger both collections and the expertise required to care for and use them... The unfortunate results of this system-wide attrition of staff are reduced access for research, longer loan processing times, delayed response to inquiries, loss of diagnostic services, and closing of selected parts or entire collections when no staff are available to support them.”

Read the full statement at <http://nscalliance.org/?p=934>.

Incorporate Specimen Data Transcription Into Your Course

Professors who are preparing their course content for the new semester may want to include a day for their students to participate in WeDigBio. The 2016 event will be held on October 20-23.

Austin Mast, a professor at Florida State University and an organizer of WeDigBio, offers this suggestion of how to incorporate the worldwide digitization event into a course: “Last year I reserved a computer lab for my Field Botany class during WeDigBio, and the students transcribed specimen labels at one of the participating citizen science platforms (Notes from Nature) while working through the exercises at <https://www.wedigbio.org/content/educational-exercises>. It was very popular.”

WeDigBio 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.

Professors who participate in WeDigBio should complete the form at <https://www.wedigbio.org/content/wedigbio-2016-event-hosts>.

Students Can Contribute Species Content to the Encyclopedia of Life

The Encyclopedia of Life is encouraging professors to include undergraduate and graduate students in creating content for the website. The Encyclopedia of Life is a global collaboration among scientists and the general public to make authoritative information and literature about all 1.9 million named species freely accessible online.

Undergraduate and graduate students can contribute to the Encyclopedia of Life in the following ways:

- Summarize species information in an overview suitable for the general public (Brief Summary; 300-400 words +/-)
- Write a more comprehensive species account (Comprehensive Description; 500-700 words +/-)
- Write about an individual topic such as general ecology (Please see Writing Content for EOL Chapters for more information: http://eol.org/info/writing_eol_chapters)

Instructors are responsible for reviewing and vetting student work. The EOL Learning + Education team can help facilitate the upload of reviewed information to the Encyclopedia of Life.

The benefits of this activity for students include an opportunity to research and synthesize information to communicate science to the general public. Students, instructors and institutions receive attribution and recognition on the Encyclopedia of Life.

If interested, please contact Tracy Barbaro: tbarbaro@eol.org.

Save the Date: Inaugural Digital Data in Biodiversity Research Conference

iDigBio, the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology, and the University of Michigan Herbarium are pleased to announce the inaugural Digital Data in Biodiversity Research Conference, to be held in Ann Arbor, MI, June 5-6, 2017.

The rapid mobilization of digitized biodiversity data, led largely in the United States by the National Science Foundation's Advancing Digitization of Biodiversity Collections program, has resulted in a substantial increase in available data for research and related activities. This conference will encompass the uses of digitized data across all biodiversity disciplines, with special emphasis on digitized specimen data and the potential for "big data" analytics in organismal biology.

A full conference description and call for papers are in process and will be released in late autumn. Please save the date and watch for further announcements on the iDigBio website (<http://www.idigbio.org>). This conference will provide an important opportunity to explore digital data tools, techniques, discoveries, and outcomes across the biodiversity sciences.

For further information or to ensure that you are on the email list, please contact Gil Nelson at iDigBio (gnelson@bio.fsu.edu).

Podcast Explores Ways to Effectively Engage Citizen Scientists

The burgeoning field of citizen science offers the public an opportunity to participate directly in research and data analysis--and it offers scientists access to robust data sets that previously would have been impossible to collect. Unfortunately, research on citizen science itself has often been lacking, with most studies focused on existing participants and little attention paid to the wider public's interest in these important projects. The August episode of BioScience Talks, explores recent research by Vicki Martin of Southern Cross University, in Lismore, Australia. Martin describes the results of a groundbreaking 1145-person survey of marine users and their attitudes toward citizen science projects. The interview also explores the study's implications for the general public and for researchers eager to catch a ride on the citizen science wave.

Listen to this interview at <https://www.aibs.org/publications/news/latest-bioscience-talks-podcast.html>.

News Coverage of Previously Unknown Dolphin Species

As reported by *The Washington Post*, a new species of dolphin was discovered within the Smithsonian's collections. "It happens more often than you'd think: Research scientists go digging around the dusty collections of your local natural history museum and find species hitherto unknown to science. Whatever sits on display when you visit—ancient human art, towering dinosaurs, slightly off-putting taxidermy—is just the tip of the iceberg." Read the full article at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/speaking-of-science/wp/2016/08/17/new-species-of-dolphin-discovered-in-the-halls-of-the-smithsonian/>.

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.