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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.

63 Scientific Organizations Write to Trump about Science

A group of leading scientific organizations wrote to President-elect Trump to urge him to make scientific research and education a priority in his administration.

“Science has not been, nor do we think it should be, a partisan issue. Rather it is a public benefit,” states the letter spearheaded by the American Institute of Biological Sciences.

Specifically, the statement asks the Trump administration to take swift action to make scientific research a budget priority, to appointment a presidential science advisor with strong scientific credentials, and to use peer-reviewed scientific information to inform decisions.

Read the letter and the full list of signatories at https://www.aibs.org/position-statements/20161222_trump_transition_letter.html.

NSC Alliance Members Help Identify Future for Collections Research

Representatives of several NSC Alliance member institutions were in Washington, DC on January 5-6, 2017 to participate in a workshop organized by the Biodiversity Collections Network. The meeting brought together a rich mix of researchers to consider the biodiversity collections community's progress toward the goals outlined in the national framework for the Network Integrated Biocollections Alliance, and to consider future research options. A draft report from the workshop will be forthcoming and available for community comment.

If you have questions or would like additional information about NSC Alliance's participation in this initiative, please contact NSC Alliance president Dr. Joseph Cook.

NSC Alliance Calls for Increased Coordination on Soil Research

In comments provided to the federal government's National Science and Technology Council, the NSC Alliance expressed support for a developing national plan for soils research. The NSC Alliance also expressed strong support for new investments to understand soil biodiversity, and that these efforts should connect to and build on existing biodiversity initiatives such as those of the National Science Foundation and Smithsonian Institution. The letter was submitted in response to a request for information on the "[Framework for a Federal Strategic Plan for Soil Science](#)."

The NSC Alliance also noted the limited number of existing soil collections. "This has limited our ability to understand the soil biome and how it is being altered in response to changing environmental conditions. It has also hindered our ability to understand how soil biodiversity interacts with other biological diversity. These collections have been limited, in part, because of a lack of federal support to conduct these surveys and curate these collections. New investments are required."

[Read the letter.](#)

New Lawmakers Assigned to Science Committees

Details about how the new Congress will function, including who will serve on various committees, are emerging.

The House and Senate Appropriations Committees, which are responsible for allocating federal funding, will have several new faces. In the Senate, Senators Marco Rubio (R-FL), Joe Manchin (D-WV), and freshmen John Kennedy (R-LA) and Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) will join the committee. In the House, Representatives Katherine Clark (D-MA), Grace Meng (D-NY), John Moolenaar (R-MI), Dan Newhouse (R-WA), Mark Pocan (D-WI), and freshmen Pete Aguilar (D-CA) and Scott Taylor (R-VA) secured seats on the Appropriations Committee.

The committees with jurisdiction over science will also have new members. The House Science, Space, and Technology Committee has many newly elected members: Ralph Abraham (R-LA),

Jim Banks (R-IN), Andy Biggs (R-AZ), Warren Davidson (R-OH), Neal Dunn (R-FL), Clay Higgins (R-LA), Darin LaHood (R-IL), Roger Marshall (R-KS), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), and Daniel Webster (R-FL). The Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee will have a mix of veteran and freshmen lawmakers joining its ranks, including Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), James Inhofe (R-OK), Mike Lee (R-UT), Catherine Cortez Matso (D-NV), and Todd Young (R-IN).

Congress Passes Innovation Bill

At the very end of the 114th session of Congress, lawmakers passed the “American Innovation and Competitiveness Act,” S. 3084. The Senate unanimously approved the bill on 10 December, the last day of the legislative session. The legislation was then adopted during a pro forma session of the House of Representatives. President Obama signed it into law on 6 January 2017.

“Sending this bill to the White House is an overtime victory for science in the closing days of 2016,” said Senator John Thune (R-SD), who chairs the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee. “This bill only passed the Senate in the early morning hours of Saturday after the House had already finished its business. It looked like the clock had run out, but the bipartisan team of House and Senate supporters behind this bill kept pushing.”

S. 3084 is a partial successor to the America COMPETES Act, which authorized funding for the National Science Foundation, National Institutes of Standards and Technology and the Office of Science and Technology Policy. The legislative authorizations for these agencies expired three years ago.

Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) - the senior Democrat on the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology - supported the bill, but regretted that it did not recommend funding levels. “I believe that is a missed opportunity to send a signal to U.S. scientists and the world about how much we value and need a vibrant U.S. science and technology enterprise.”

The bill sets new policy directions for NSF, as well as reaffirms some existing policies. It sustains the current system of evaluating proposals on the basis of intellectual merit and broader impacts, but adds that this system is “to assure that the Foundation’s activities are in the national interest...” This is a departure from the language included in the House-passed bill that would have required NSF only fund grants that meet one of six categories in support of the “national interest.” In response to the strong concerns of representatives of the scientific community, this provision was removed from the final legislation.

The American Innovation and Competitiveness Act directs the NSF to provide public justification of each grant awarded, including a non-technical description of the project’s purpose. The agency has already been working to improve communications about its funding decisions to the public. These policy changes were motivated because of additional congressional scrutiny over particular award decisions, especially for social science and climate research.

New oversight will be given to large research projects funded by NSF's Major Research Equipment and Facilities Construction account. Several projects have been the target of congressional oversight due to projected cost overruns and lax management by NSF. The legislation further directs NSF to evaluate needs for mid-scale research instrumentation and facilities. The agency currently funds more expensive projects (\$100,000-\$4,000,000 for instruments and \$100 million or more for major facilities), but there is no dedicated funding for less expensive projects.

NSF will also have to report to Congress annually about rotators who are paid higher than the maximum rate of pay for the Senior Executive Service. Some lawmakers have expressed concern that temporary employees on loan to NSF from universities and other research institutions are paid more than permanent federal employees.

The Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) will be renamed to the Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research. The program directs funding to states and U.S. territories that have historically received less federal research funding than other states.

A new interagency working group will be established to provide recommendations on eliminating unnecessary and redundant paperwork for researchers and institutions. The group is directed to explore uniform grant proposals and financial disclosures, and to review regulations on research progress reports.

The bill directs federal science agencies to update policies on attendance at scientific and technical workshops. For the past five years, federal scientists have experienced difficulties in attending scientific conferences due to guidance issued by the White House for agencies to cut travel costs.

The legislation also includes numerous sections regarding science education, including a new advisory panel on diversity in the federal scientific workforce and program changes to improve retention of science teachers in NSF's Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program.

Webinar on Paleontological Resources

The iDigBio Paleo Data and Digitization Working Group is hosting a webinar led by Dr. Scott Foss, Bureau of Land Management Senior Paleontologist. The webinar will provide an opportunity to learn about and discuss the Paleontological Resources Preservation Act of 2009. The webinar is scheduled for January 19 at 3:00 p.m. EST. For further information, login instructions, and instructions for commenting on the Department of Interior's proposed regulations, see <https://www.idigbio.org/content/webinar-paleontological-resources-preservation-act-2009-prpa>.

Workshop to Help Scientists Develop Interdisciplinary Skills

Reports abound from professional societies, the Academies, government agencies, and researchers calling attention to the fact that science is increasingly an inter-disciplinary, trans-disciplinary, inter-institutional, and international endeavor. In short, science has become a “team sport.”

There is a real and present need to better prepare scientists for success in this new collaborative environment. The American Institute of Biological Sciences is responding to this call with a new program for scientists, educators, and research managers.

Team science is increasingly common in 21st century biological, life, and environmental sciences. Collaboration is no longer limited to sharing ideas with the biologist in the lab next door. The questions confronting science often require teams that may include a mix of computer and information scientists, physical and social scientists, mathematicians, ethicists, and even policy and management experts, as well as community stakeholders and citizen scientists. Adding to this complexity, teams span programs within organizations, cross organization boundaries to form institutional consortia, and often include international partners.

This intensive, two-day, interactive, professional development course was developed by scientists and experts on collaboration and teamwork to provide participants with the knowledge and skills required to become productive and effective members of scientific teams.

Nothing teaches collaboration like practicing collaboration. This is not a course that asks you to learn in isolation. It is a microcosm of scientific collaboration, with extensive hands-on learning as part of a scientific team.

Who should attend?

- Research program managers
- Departmental leaders
- Scientists engaged in collaborative projects
- Graduate students and post-docs looking to augment basic research skills
- Scientists working at the interface of different fields
- Groups interested in developing successful research proposals
- Academic, government, and industry scientists

This course is designed for anyone involved in collaborative scientific endeavors. Team leaders will find the course especially helpful. Because participants will work on “real-world” team science concerns, we encourage multiple members of a team to attend together.

Participants will develop and hone the skills needed to:

- Engage in collaborative scientific ventures;
- Eliminate barriers to effective team science;
- Execute the factors that make collaborations successful;
- Build the right scientific team;
- Perform with a variety of personalities and work approaches;
- Create a team roadmap;
- Enact the five keys to leadership;

- Develop effective communication strategies and techniques;
- Facilitate scientific collaborations; and,
- Apply practical solutions for team science concerns.

Representatives of NSC Alliance members receive a \$100 discount on the registration fee.

Learn more and register at https://www.aibs.org/events/team_science_event.html.

New Collections-Based Workshop and Faculty Mentoring Network for Undergraduate Biology Educators

Are you interested in incorporating more real data into your undergraduate courses? Natural history collections have been digitizing (the process of converting information into a digital format) their holdings and making them available online, creating a vast resource for biodiversity data that educators can access!

Apply now to join the 2017 “Resources for Collections-Based Undergraduate Education” Faculty Mentoring Network. Participants will be introduced to new materials and modules that address fundamental biological principles using real biodiversity collections data. Accepted applicants will participate in virtual sessions and a two-day workshop (held on May 24-25, 2017, in Gainesville, Florida), and continue to collaborate and receive mentoring online as they customize and implement activities in their own classrooms.

This opportunity is part of a collaboration among iDigBio (Integrated Digitized Biocollections), QUBES (Quantitative Undergraduate Biology Education and Synthesis), Kurator, AIM-UP! (Advancing Integration of Museum into Undergraduate Programs), and BLUE (Biodiversity Literacy in Undergraduate Education).

Applications are due February 6, 2017. Please visit https://qubeshub.org/groups/nhc_fmnh to apply and for additional information about requirements, expectations, and funding opportunities.

If you have questions please contact Molly Phillips (mphillips@flmnh.ufl.edu) or Anna Monfils (monfilak@cmich.edu).

NSC Alliance Welcomes New Board of Directors

The NSC Alliance welcomes new members to the Board of Directors. Elected to the Board in December are:

Treasurer:

Dr. Sarah George, Utah Museum of Natural History

Board:

Dr. John Bates, Field Museum of Natural History

Dr. Neil Cobb, Merriam-Powell Center for Environmental Research

Dr. John Demboski, Denver Museum of Nature and Science

Dr. Scott Edwards, Harvard University

Dr. Peter Frisch, Botanical Research Institute of Texas

Dr. James Miller, Missouri Botanical Garden

Ms. Linda Lee “Cissy” Farm, Interim CEO and President of the Bishop Museum was appointed to fulfill a term on the Board that was recently vacated by her predecessor at the Bishop.

2016 Year in Review

In 2016, the NSC Alliance engaged in a number of notable activities to raise the profile of natural history collections with policymakers, researchers, and the general public. A few highlights are presented below:

- NSC Alliance led the effort to reverse the suspension of the Collections in Support of Biological Research program by the National Science Foundation (NSF). The program was put on “hiatus” in the spring of 2016 pending agency review. In response to community opposition, NSF reinstated the program on a biennial basis.
- Advocated to congressional lawmakers in support of increased funding for research, curation, and digitization of natural history collections for the National Science Foundation, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Department of the Interior.
- Sent a letter signed by 63 scientific organizations to President-elect Trump about the role science should play in his administration.
- Created two short reports on how natural history collections contribute to climate change research.
- Gained five new institutional members: Berkeley Natural History Museums, Duke Lemur Center, Entomological Collections Network, Merriam-Powell Center for Environmental Research, and Milwaukee Public Museum.
- Supported a bill to reauthorize the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the primary federal agency that supports museum education programs, collections curation, and museum professional development.

[Read the 2016 NSCA summary.](#)

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.