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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.

Participate in the 2017 Congressional Visits Day

Scientists and graduate students who are interested in communicating the importance of federal investments in scientific research and education to lawmakers are invited to participate in the Biological and Ecological Sciences Coalition (BESC) Congressional Visits Day in Washington, DC.

This event is an opportunity for scientists to meet with their members of Congress to discuss the importance of federal funding for biological research and education. Event participants advocate for federal investments in biological sciences research, with a primary focus on the National Science Foundation, as well as other federal agencies.

This year's event will be held on April 25-26, 2017 in Washington, DC. The first day of the program is a training program that will prepare participants for meetings with congressional offices. The second day is spent on Capitol Hill meeting with members of Congress and their staff.

There is no cost to participate in this event, but space is limited. BESC and its member organizations are not able to pay/reimburse participants for their travel expenses.

Learn more about the event and express your interest in participating at www.aibs.org/public-policy/congressional_visits_day.html. The deadline to sign up is March 1, 2017.

Scientific Societies Speak Out on Immigration

The Natural Science Collections Alliance signed a letter, along with 150 other scientific organizations, to express concern over a recent Executive Order issued by President Trump.

The executive order, signed on 27 January 2017, prevents citizens of seven countries from traveling into the U.S. Federal courts subsequently suspended the travel ban while the case is being considered. Moreover, a federal judge in Virginia issued a preliminary injunction that prevents the travel ban from being implemented in the state.

“The Executive Order will discourage many of the best and brightest international students, scholars, engineers and scientists from studying and working, attending academic and scientific conferences, or seeking to build new businesses in the United States,” states the letter. “Implementation of this policy will compromise the United States’ ability to attract international scientific talent and maintain scientific and economic leadership.”

Another letter circulated within the scientific community has received more than 43,000 signatures in opposition to the travel ban, including more than 60 Nobel Laureates and 500 members of the National Academies.

Read the multi-society letter at https://www.aibs.org/position-statements/20170131_immigration.html.

Federal Hiring Freeze

President Trump issued an Executive Memorandum on 23 January 2017 that implements a hiring freeze across the federal government. Any positions that were vacant at noon on 22 January cannot be filled and no new jobs can be created. There is no end date specified for the freeze. The military and positions related to national security or public safety are exempted.

White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer said the guidance would halt the “dramatic expansion of the federal workforce in recent years.”

Federal employment has grown from 2.78 million civilian workers in 2008 to 2.8 million employees eight years later. Most of this rise came from hiring at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

President Trump has directed the hiring of 10,000 additional immigration officers and ordered a review of military readiness, which could call for an expansion of the military.

The White House Office of Management and Budget later stated that some newly hired federal workers might see their employment offers rescinded. Anyone who accepted a job before noon on 22 January and has a start date on or before 22 February can still report to work.

The White House is working on a “long-term plan to reduce the size of the Federal Government’s workforce through attrition.”

NSC Alliance Calls for Changes to Paleo Rule

In official comments to the Department of the Interior, the Natural Science Collections Alliance recommended several revisions to the draft rule on paleontological resources preservation.

The proposed rule is intended to address the management, collection, and curation of paleontological resources from federal lands using scientific principles and expertise, including collection in accordance with permits; curation in an approved repository; and maintenance of confidentiality of specific locality data.

Among the concerns expressed are the proposed prohibition on disclosing information about the specific location of paleontological resources and the burdensome permitting process. Under the proposed rule, the National Park Service and other Interior Bureaus would have their own permit application forms. Moreover, although the Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Reclamation, and the Fish and Wildlife Service are all using DI Form 9002 (Paleontological Resource Use Permit Application), each bureau has its own instructions for how to complete each field on the form. The differences in the instructions are significant enough that an applicant would have to complete a new application for each permit they seek.

The letter also addresses the financial burdens faced by paleontological resources repositories. “The organizations that house paleontological resources bear a large financial burden in terms of storage, curation, and reporting requirements. Although many federal collections are curated by DOI, many others are located in non-governmental facilities, such as museums and universities. The federal government should do more to defray the associated costs of curation of federal paleontological resources. Ownership comes with financial responsibilities.”

[Read NSC Alliance’s comments.](#)

NSF Public Access Rules Go Into Effect

Grantees of the National Science Foundation (NSF) will now be required to provide the public access to publications and certain data resulting from NSF-funded research. The plan was adopted in 2015 but goes into effect 25 January 2017. Any awards resulting from proposals submitted on or after this date will have to comply with the public access requirements. Learn more at https://www.nsf.gov/news/special_reports/public_access/index.jsp.

Plant Conservation Legislation Introduced

Bipartisan legislation has been introduced in the House of Representatives to support the botanical research capacity of the federal government. H.R. 1054 is sponsored by Representatives Mike Quigley (D-IL) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL).

The bill emphasizes the importance of protecting native plants and addresses botanical workforce issues. It would create a new program of botanical science research within the Department of the Interior to help increase federal botanic expertise and would allow Interior to hire additional botanical personnel. The bill would create a student loan repayment program for botanists. It would also create a preference for federal agencies to use locally-adapted native plant materials in their land management activities.

“One of our nation’s greatest assets is its biodiversity, which is why we must support the health of these ecosystems, as well as the dedicated scientists that have made our earth’s preservation their life’s work,” said Quigley in statement. “I am pleased that this bill will support their mission to sustain native and locally adapted plants so that America remains a vibrant, inspiring, and sustainable place to call home.”

“Introducing this bill with my colleague, Mike, is a positive step in ensuring the preservation, conservation, and restoration of the native species that characterize our communities and nation,” said Ros-Lehtinen. “We have a responsibility to help maintain a healthy and sound ecosystem that we can all be proud of. I’m glad that this bill will also encourage young people to enter careers in botanical science.”

The U.S. is projected to lose roughly half of its botanical experts in the next decade due to retirements. Some federal agencies, including the U.S. Geological Survey and Bureau of Land Management have already reported a deficiency in their botanical workforce. Meanwhile, fewer advanced degrees in botany are being awarded.

***Washington Post* Article on Digitization**

A recent article published by the *Washington Post* on “This is how you photograph a million dead plants without losing your mind” explores the mechanics of herbaria specimen digitization. Three Smithsonian employees use a conveyor belt to photograph the museum’s botany collection, which encompasses 5 million specimens.

Read the article at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/speaking-of-science/wp/2017/02/08/this-is-how-you-photograph-a-million-dead-plants-without-losing-your-mind/?utm_term=.14ddf80d18d3.

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.

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.