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In this Issue:

- NSC Alliance Urges Congress to Invest in NSF
- Congressional Leaders Close to Reaching Deal on FY 2017 Spending
- Smithsonian Focus of House Oversight Hearing
- NSF Oversight Hearing Covers Little New Ground
- Opposition to the University of Louisiana Monroe's Plan to Ditch Collections
- PNAS Article on IsoBank

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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.

NSC Alliance Urges Congress to Invest in NSF

In testimony to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, the NSC Alliance highlighted the important role that natural history collections play.

“Natural science collections play an integral role in advancing research that improves public health, agriculture, natural resource management, biodiversity conservation, and American innovation,” states the testimony. “Current research involving natural science collections is also contributing to the development of new cyberinfrastructure, data visualization tools, and improved data management.”

The National Science Foundation (NSF) is a core federal supporter of scientific collections. NSF supports research that utilizes existing collections as well as studies that gather new natural history specimens. NSF's Directorates for Biological Sciences (BIO), Geosciences (GEO), and Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE) support research and student training opportunities in natural history collections.

The testimony called for \$8.0 billion for NSF in fiscal year 2018.

Read the NSC Alliance testimony at <http://nscalliance.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/owt-house-cjs-fy18-nzca-final.pdf>.

Congressional Leaders Close to Reaching Deal on FY 2017 Spending

Lawmakers seem to be inching closer to an agreement on current year spending levels. The federal government has been operating on a continuing resolution since 1 October 2016, which has kept government agencies open but at FY 2016 funding levels.

Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS) told reporters that Congress is “very close” to a deal to finish FY 2017 appropriations. Lawmakers aim to pass an omnibus that will combine the 11 remaining bills into one package for final passage.

“The last thing that we want is a continuing resolution or a shutdown of government,” said Moran, who chairs the Senate panel responsible for military construction funding. The Senator added that Congress “couldn’t get an appropriations bill passed” at the reduced spending levels proposed by President Trump for FY 2017.

The president is seeking \$18 billion in cuts from non-defense programs to partially offset a \$33 billion increase in military spending. Research programs represent a disproportionate amount of the suggested cuts. Nearly \$4 billion would be cut from science agencies. This is more than 20 percent of the proposed cuts, even though science represents only 1 percent of total federal spending.

House appropriator Ken Calvert (R-CA) agreed. “Those cuts are highly improbable.”

When Senator Roy Blunt (R-MO) was asked about the President’s proposed cuts to FY 2017 spending, he said, “no, no.” Blunt chairs the subcommittee responsible for labor, health, and education.

Criticism of the proposed cuts has been bipartisan.

The President wants to “cut off NIH cancer research funding to pay for the [border] wall,” said Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer (D-NY).

Current government funding runs out on 28 April.

Smithsonian Focus of House Oversight Hearing

On 28 March, the Committee on House Administration held an oversight hearing on the Smithsonian Institution. The brief, 40 minute long hearing focused mainly on Smithsonian’s strategic planning and the institution’s maintenance backlog.

Committee Chairman Gregg Harper (R-MS) spoke of the value of the museums. “The Smithsonian Institution plays a critical role in collecting and preserving our nation’s history and culture . . . and advances critical scientific discovery and research.” He also raised the challenges the organization faces, including a growing maintenance backlog, balancing new strategic

initiatives with available funding, and broadening public access to collections in person and digitally.

Dr. David J. Skorton, Secretary of the Smithsonian, spoke about the long-term value of Smithsonian collections. “Your investment in the Smithsonian is an investment in the civic, educational, scientific, and artistic life of our nation.” Skorton also highlighted the need to “greatly increasing digital access” to collections. To date, 29 million items have been digitized from Smithsonian’s collections of 154 million items.

Another issue raised during the hearing was the need to pay attention to “graying of the workforce” in curatorial and scientific ranks. Skorton stated that Smithsonian needs to be ready to hire a “renewed workforce.”

Representatives Robert Brady (D-PA), Barbara Comstock (R-VA), Rodney Davis (R-IL), and Adrian Smith (R-NE) also attended the hearing.

NSF Oversight Hearing Covers Little New Ground

On 21 March, the House Science Subcommittee on Research and Technology considered how to keep the National Science Foundation (NSF) at the forefront of innovation. The oversight hearing addressed issues relating to the agency’s reauthorization, including reproducibility of scientific findings and the balance of funding across scientific disciplines. All of these issues have been subjects of interest to the Committee in recent years.

Subcommittee Chairwoman Barbara Comstock (R-VA) opened the hearing stating: “We will examine particular challenges such as setting priorities during a time of budgetary constraints, and ensuring that all taxpayer-funded research is high quality, reproducible and conducted with integrity.”

“Funding for the NSF has not been what I would have liked to have seen in recent years,” said Ranking Member Daniel Lipinski (D-IL). “I think many of my colleagues agree. This committee needs to push to make NSF funding a priority in this Congress as we face possible significant budget cuts. While we do this, we also need to make sure that NSF does the most possible with limited resources.”

The Science Committee recently proposed directing 70 percent of NSF research funding to math, computer science, biological sciences, and engineering as part of the panel’s views on the 2018 budget. This is not the first time that Representatives have proposed specifying directorate level funding at NSF. This specific proposal would result in significant cuts to social science and geoscience directorates.

Democratic members of the committee pushed back against this proposal during the hearing. Top Democrat Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) rejected the idea of “slashing funding for the geosciences or social and behavioral sciences in order to increase funding for other fields.”

Opposition to the University of Louisiana Monroe's Plan to Ditch Collections

The University of Louisiana Monroe plans to displace a storage facility for its natural history collections as part of renovations of a track and field facility. The Museum of Natural History was initially given 48 hours to suggest an alternate location on campus for the 6 million plus specimens, and any specimens that were not rehoused by the end of July would be destroyed.

The Natural Science Collections Alliance wrote to the university president about the university's plans to rapidly dismantle its natural history collections.

“Natural history museums nationwide are experiencing renewed interest and vitality, so it is disturbing to learn that an emerging university is electing to jettison important research infrastructure and the educational benefits derived from this resource, especially the specimens and associated data gathered by your faculty over decades of research on the biological and ecological systems of northern Louisiana and across the region. These specimens and associated data are irreplaceable national treasures that are critically important to research into the natural history of Louisiana and surrounding region. Because the ULM collections also shed light on how regional biodiversity is changing in response to rapid environmental change, your natural history museum is of national importance.”

The letter called for the preservation of the collections at the university or for the collections to be moved to another institution.

In recent days, it has been reported that several other institutions have offered to rehome the collections so that they are not discarded.

The university said that “state appropriations had been cut more than 50 percent since 2008 and has struggled to provide public services...”

Read the NSC Alliance letter to the University of Louisiana Monroe at <http://nscalliance.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/letter-to-ul-monroe-president-32017.pdf>.

PNAS Article on IsoBank

A new opinion piece published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* urges the creation of an IsoBank, a central repository for isotopic data.

The article is an outcome of a workshop cosponsored by the Biodiversity Collections Network, which NSC Alliance participates in. NSC Alliance members helped organize and participated in the workshop.

Read the article at <http://www.pnas.org/content/114/12/2997.short>.

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.