

In this Issue:

- U.S. to Withdraw from UNESCO
 - NSF Announces Major Changes to Grant Solicitation Process
 - PCAST to be Revived, Reports Indicate
 - Joint Letter from NSC Alliance and SPNHC Regarding Brazilian Collections
 - FY 2018 Funding Bill Advances Through House
 - News Coverage: Bird Specimens and Air Pollution
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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.

U.S. to Withdraw from UNESCO

The Trump Administration announced earlier this month that the United States is leaving a United Nations body tasked with promoting international collaboration on educational, cultural, and scientific endeavors. The U.S. will formally withdraw from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at the end of 2018.

In a statement from the State Department, the administration stated that: “This decision was not taken lightly, and reflects U.S. concerns with mounting arrears at UNESCO, the need for fundamental reform in the organization, and continuing anti-Israel bias at UNESCO.”

The U.S. stopped contributing financially to UNESCO about six years ago over concerns about the recognition of Palestine as an independent state. As a result, the U.S. lost its voting privileges four years ago.

UNESCO's scientific programs include preservation of biologically diverse ecosystems. The international organization also weighed in on the preservation of museums and collections in a [2015 report](#).

UNESCO's Director-General Irina Bokova said that the U.S. and UNESCO have partnered on many meaningful projects, including “our interaction with the United States Geological Survey,

with the US Army Corps of Engineers, with United States professional societies, to advance research for the sustainable management of water resources, agriculture.”

NSF Announces Major Changes to Grant Solicitation Process

The National Science Foundation (NSF) will no longer require pre-proposals for certain biology research programs. Instead, the Directorate for Biological Sciences is implementing a no deadline, full-proposal review process for four of its five divisions.

The new process starts in January 2018, but does not include the Division of Emerging Frontiers, which runs the MacroSystems Biology and Early NEON Science program and the Origin of Life program. All other biology research programs will be impacted. Consequently, the Division of Environmental Biology and the Division of Integrative Organismal Systems will discontinue their preliminary proposal mechanisms.

According to the agency, “By accepting proposals at any time, investigators will have greater opportunities to prepare their proposals, build strong collaborations, and think more creatively, thereby resulting in more complex, interdisciplinary projects that have the potential to dramatically advance biological science. We anticipate that the elimination of deadlines will reduce the burden on institutions and the community by expanding the submission period over the course of the year, in contrast to the previous fixed yearly deadlines.”

The next several months will be a period of transition, during which some grant solicitations will continue under the old guidelines. For instance, the deadline for the Molecular and Cellular Biosciences solicitation is still November 20, 2017 for fiscal year 2018 grants. The new, no deadline solicitation for that program will be available in the summer of 2018 and proposals can be submitted at any time.

Learn more at <https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2018/nsf18011/nsf18011.jsp>.

PCAST to be Revived, Reports Indicate

The White House has confirmed that the President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology will be reconstituted. President Trump is expected to sign an executive order in the near future to reapprove the committee. Questions remain, however, about whether the Council will be funded and whether or not it will continue to have dedicated staff support.

The Council has been vacant since President Obama’s departure from the White House. Administrations dating back to President Franklin Roosevelt have received guidance from scientific advisory bodies.

According to a White House official, once a new director for the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) is confirmed, they will be charged with reassembling the Council. There is not currently a director of OSTP and no nomination has been announced.

Joint Letter from NSC Alliance and SPNHC Regarding Brazilian Collections

In response to an international appeal for assistance, the presidents of the Natural Science Collections Alliance and the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections sent a joint letter to the director of Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi in Brazil.

The Brazilian museum was facing major budget cuts. It had already closed its Amazon biodiversity research unit and zoological park and its scientific collections were threatened by a 44 percent budget cut.

The museum's director had sent out an [open letter](#) to the world asking for the international community to “help raise the awareness to the government...so that we can continue to conduct our research, disclose knowledge of excellence, help decision-makers achieve good public policies for the Amazon, and to move the development of a state rich in biodiversity and biodiversity, inhabited by a happy and caring people.”

The societies highlighted the international nature of science in their [letter](#). “The international links between institutions are strong and increasingly important as we help society and governments address challenges related to food security, emerging zoonotic pathogens and public health, loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services, invasive pests and other serious issues. Worldwide, natural history museums are experiencing renewed interest and vitality, so it is disturbing to learn that a world-renowned institution, such as the Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi is seeing such a dramatic loss of financial support. The specimens and associated data held in your collections are irreplaceable and critically important to research into changing environmental conditions and the natural history of an extraordinarily biologically diverse region of our planet.”

After the NSC Alliance and SPNHC letter was sent, the Brazilian Ministry of Science and Technology granted a temporary reprieve to the museum and covered the fixed expenses for 2017. The 2018 budget, however, could still contain large budget cuts.

FY 2018 Funding Bill Advances Through House

The House of Representatives has passed a \$1.23 trillion package of eight spending bills to fund federal agencies in fiscal year (FY) 2018. More than 300 amendments were considered during debate on the House floor. The bill ultimately passed 211 to 198.

Funding would be cut for many federal agencies, including the National Science Foundation (NSF), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Geological Survey, and intramural agricultural research.

Representative Lamar Smith (R-TX), who chairs the House Science Committee, successfully offered a largely symbolic amendment that takes aim at social science and climate change

research funding by NSF. The amendment reduces funding for all NSF research by \$30.2 million and then increases funding by the same amount. Smith said that the motivation for the amendment was to increase funding for basic biological and physical research. Since NSF funding is not legislatively specified for individual research directorates, the amendment does not actually change the funding level for any research programs.

Another amendment would have restored funding for science and technology at the EPA to 2017 levels. The agency's science funding would be cut by 15 percent if the House passed bill were enacted. Representatives David Price (D-NC), Mike Quigley (D-IL), Gerry Connolly (D-VA), and Jared Polis (D-CO) sponsored the amendment, which was not adopted.

Now that the House has passed all 12 annual appropriations bills, attention turns to the Senate, where the full chamber has considered no bills on the floor. Even though the new fiscal year started on October 1, the government is funded through December 8 under a continuing resolution.

News Coverage: Bird Specimens and Air Pollution

The *New York Times* covered a new study that used natural history specimens to measure historical air pollution. In "The Dirty Secrets Saved in Dead Birds' Feathers," author Joanna Klein writes about how the soot on bird specimens collected since 1850 can be used to figure out urban air pollution before federal monitoring standards were created.

"We can estimate how much smoke was actually in the atmosphere," said Shane DuBay, a graduate student in evolutionary biology at The Field Museum and the University of Chicago and co-author of the study. "It might have been worse than the best estimates have predicted."

Read the article at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/10/science/birds-air-pollution.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.

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