

In this Issue:

- Congress Reaches Deal on Tax Reform
- Trump's Environmental Nominees Advancing Through Senate
- Scientists File Lawsuit Against National Monuments Reduction
- Senate Panel Releases Environmental Funding Bill
- Participate in the 2018 Congressional Visits Day
- Arctic Public Programming Internships
- Apply for the 2018 Emerging Public Policy Leadership Award

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 <http://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.

Congress Reaches Deal on Tax Reform

On December 13, leaders in Congress announced that they had reached a final deal regarding tax reform legislation. The compromise is reportedly more similar to the bill passed by the Senate than the legislation crafted by the House.

Notably, the compromise purportedly retains the existing tax break for charitable deductions. However, since the standard deduction will be raised to \$24,000 for couples and \$12,000 for individuals, millions fewer taxpayers will be able to claim the deduction. Some non-profits have raised concerns about impacts to future charitable giving.

Another provision that would have taxed tuition waivers for graduate students does not appear in the final bill.

Representative Pete Sessions (R-TX) and thirty other lawmakers had sent a letter to House leadership urging them to keep existing tax policies in place regarding tuition waivers for graduate students.

The tax reform bill passed by the House of Representatives, H.R. 1, would have increased taxes for many graduate students because tuition waivers would be taxed as income, even though students do not directly receive the money.

As the letter from lawmakers points out, 57 percent of waiver recipients are graduate students in science, technology, engineering, and math.

“A repeal of the income exclusion for graduate tuition waivers would harm our nation’s students, undermine our competitive position, and hold back economic growth,” states the letter. “We strongly urge you to ensure that this harmful provision is not in the final version of the *Tax Cuts and Jobs Act*.”

The compromise legislation must pass the Senate and House of Representatives before going to the President’s desk for a signature.

Trump’s Environmental Nominees Advancing Through Senate

Several nominations for key environmental posts within the Trump Administration are moving through the confirmation process in the Senate.

The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee approved the nomination of Kathleen Harnett White to chair the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) along a party-line vote of 11 to 10.

The ranking Democrat, Senator Tom Carper (DE) said that “it was painful to watch” White’s testimony during her confirmation hearing. “It was painful to hear. And we should not inflict this pain on the people of this country.”

James Connaughton, former Chair of the CEQ under President George W. Bush, said, “she is clearly highly qualified, adept, and has a breath of experience.”

White has been a vocal defender of fossil fuels and has questioned the science underlying climate change on numerous occasions. She has argued, “carbon dioxide has none of the characteristics of a pollutant that could harm human health” and that we do not know the extent that humans are contributing to climate change, but “it’s not likely to be very much.”

Barry Myers, the nominee to lead the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), was questioned by the Senate Commerce Committee in late November.

“I am not a scientist, but I have a passion for science and I am a leader of scientists,” Myers told the committee.

Senator Bill Nelson (D-FL) expressed concerns with the nomination. “While NOAA has always put protecting the lives and properties of Americans ahead of making a buck off forecasts and warnings, your past history ... suggests you might do otherwise.”

Myers is CEO of AccuWeather Inc. and has previously sought to privatize the National Weather Service, which is part of NOAA.

Myers responded to Nelson that he would resign from AccuWeather if confirmed by the Senate.

President Trump nominated Dr. Tim Petty to serve as Assistant Secretary of Interior for Water and Science, a position he filled in an acting role during the George W. Bush Administration. The Assistant Secretary is responsible for the U.S. Geological Survey and the Bureau of Reclamation. Dr. Petty has a Ph.D. in water science and policy and a M.S in geoscience. He has worked on Capitol Hill for Senator James Risch (R-ID) and two other Senators.

Unlike some nominees who sidestepped questions about climate change, Dr. Petty said, “climate change is real.” He also stressed the importance of openly sharing the work of Interior scientists with decision-makers because the “science community needs to be heard and that their research is heard.”

Scientists File Lawsuit Against National Monuments Reduction

The Society of Vertebrate Paleontology (SVP) is suing to block the downsizing of two national monuments in Utah ordered by President Trump. The lawsuit claims that only Congress can change the boundaries of monuments.

Protections would be lifted from 85 percent of Bears Ears National Monument and 50 percent of Grand Staircase-Escalante Monument. Trump called the creation of these national monuments “abuses” of power by his predecessors.

According to P. David Polly, president of SVP, “There were multiple reasons for making them monuments, but in both cases paleontology was one... After the [Grand Staircase] monument was established, a lot of the dinosaur material was discovered.”

Approximately 10 percent of SVP members have conducted long-term research in these national monuments or made short-term research visits to the sites.

SVP decided to pursue a lawsuit because “the damage to the science and the damage to the legal protections that we fought for is potentially so great here that, given that we can make a good case, it was a no-brainer,” said Polly.

The society subsequently joined a second lawsuit filed by a broad coalition of Native American, conservation, and historic preservation organizations.

Learn more at <http://vertpaleo.org/Society-News/SVP-Paleo-News/Society-News,-Press-Releases/Grand-Staircase-Escalante-and-Bears-Ears-National.aspx>.

Senate Panel Releases Environmental Funding Bill

The Senate Appropriations Committee released a draft bill that outlines proposed funding levels for the Department of the Interior and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). If enacted, the bill would spare agencies the harsh cuts proposed by President Trump. Moreover, the legislation includes \$1.2 billion more than the spending bill approved by the House Appropriations Committee earlier this year.

The U.S. Geological Survey is proposed to receive flat funding relative to 2017. Although the agency's total budget would not change, individual programs would vary from current funding levels. Four of the five mission areas, including Ecosystems and Climate and Land Use Change, would lose small amounts of funding in order to provide a \$12 million increase for the agency's facilities. That budget line was cut in FY 2013 and has been flat ever since, even though USGS has struggled with pipes bursting and roofs leaking at some research labs.

The budget for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would be cut by \$40 million; some of this reduction would come from the Science Support program. Forest Service's Forest and Rangeland Research program would lose 2 percent of its funding.

The Smithsonian Institution would receive an increase of \$15 million.

The EPA would lose 2 percent of its funding if the Senate bill were approved, as compared to the 31 percent cut sought by Trump or the 9 percent reduction approved by the EPA Science and Technology would be cut by 7 percent.

The Senate bill will likely not be marked up, but rather be used in the bicameral negotiations regarding FY 2018 appropriations. Congress recently passed a continuing resolution to keep the government open until 22 December.

Participate in the 2018 Congressional Visits Day

NSC Alliance members are invited to join the American Institute of Biological Sciences for the annual Congressional Visits Day in Washington, DC.

This event is an opportunity for scientists to meet with their members of Congress about the importance of federal support for biological research and education. Event participants advocate for federal funding for biological, life, and environmental sciences research. This event builds support federal research funding agencies, including the National Science Foundation.

This year's event will be held on April 17-18, 2018 in Washington, DC. During the afternoon of April 17, individuals will participate in an advocacy-training program that provides the information required to effectively advocate for their science. On April 18, scientists participate in AIBS organized meetings with their Representative and Senators.

Supplemental training program: In addition to the core event, AIBS is offering a one-day short course version of the popular AIBS Communications Boot Camp for Scientists. This eight-hour professional development program will train scientists to translate scientific information for

non-technical audiences and to engage with the news media. The course includes formal instruction as well as hands-on and interactive exercises. This professional development training will begin on the afternoon of April 16 and be completed during the morning of April 17. We are pleased to announce that participants in the Congressional Visits Day event may register for this training program at the reduced rate of \$150.

Scientists and graduate students interested in communicating the importance of federal investments in scientific research and education to lawmakers are encouraged to participate in this important event.

Registration will close on March 4, 2018. Register at https://www.aibs.org/public-policy/congressional_visits_day.html.

Arctic Public Programming Internships

Free this spring or summer? Intern at the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) and join a team of passionate ocean educators and scientists to design and host public programs that expand the themes of the museum's Narwhal: Revealing an Arctic Legend temporary exhibit to different audiences including adults, families, and teens.

Interns will work on programs such as live feeds to research vessels, Scientist is In programs, a teen climate Earth Optimism event, and film screenings. They will help with program evaluation and visitor observations, help improve volunteer-facilitated carts, conduct science content research, conduct scientist interviews, facilitate programs, and assist with program implementation and marketing.

Undergraduate students with a background and interest in science (course work, field work, other) and an interest in science communication and/or teaching are encouraged to apply. The time commitment is 40 hours a week. To maximize the project learning outcomes, applicants should have the following qualifications:

- Ability to cooperate as part of a collective team, while also working independently to reach team goals.
- Self-starter with passion and the ability to plan, organize and establish priorities to meet goals and achieve results according to a timeline with set deadlines.
- Proficient in using Microsoft Word and Excel.
- Able to speak and effectively communicate information to a group.

TIME COMMITMENT: 40 hours per week

STIPEND: \$4,900 per internship

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: Interns will learn techniques for how to use objects to engage visitors and methods for engaging visitors in interactive dialogue; effective strategies for communicating about climate change; how to plan and implement science education programs and events; how to use visitor and volunteer feedback to meet visitor needs; how to work with a

range of collaborators such as educators, volunteers, and scientists; and gain knowledge about narwhal, the Arctic, how science works, and climate change.

TIME FRAME: There are two internships available:

Spring 2018 – Three months from approximately April 2018 to June 2018

Summer 2018 – Three months from approximately June 2018 thru August 2018

TO APPLY: Please send a resume and a cover letter explaining your interests, qualifications, and what you hope to get out of such an internship to Jennifer Collins at CollinsJE@si.edu by Friday January 5, 2018.

Apply for the 2018 Emerging Public Policy Leadership Award

Are you a graduate student looking to make a difference in science policy and funding? Applications are now being accepted for the 2018 AIBS Emerging Public Policy Leadership Award. This award recognizes graduate students in the biological sciences who have demonstrated initiative and leadership in science policy. Recipients receive first-hand experience at the interface of science and public policy.

Winners receive:

- A trip to Washington, DC, to participate in the AIBS Congressional Visits Day, an annual event that brings scientists to the nation's capital to advocate for federal investment in the biological sciences, with a primary focus on the National Science Foundation. The event will be held on April 17-18, 2018. Domestic travel and hotel expenses will be paid for the winners.
- Policy and communications training, including information on the legislative process and trends in federal science funding.
- Meetings with congressional policymakers to discuss the importance of federal investment in the biological sciences.
- A one-year AIBS membership, including a subscription to the journal *BioScience* and a copy of "Communicating Science: A Primer for Working with the Media."

The 2018 award is open to U.S. citizens and U.S. permanent residents enrolled in a graduate degree program in the biological sciences, science education, or a closely allied field. Applicants should have a demonstrated interest in and commitment to science policy and/or science education policy.

Applications are due by 11:59 PM Eastern Time on January 17, 2018. The application guidelines can be downloaded at <http://www.aibs.org/public-policy/eppla.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.