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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 <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.

NSC Alliance Urges Senate Appropriators to Fund IMLS

The Natural Science Collections Alliance (NSC Alliance) has provided testimony to the Senate Appropriations Committee regarding fiscal year (FY) 2020 funding for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

“Museums strengthen our national economy. They provide core educational and outreach programs to engage the public and contribute more than \$50 billion to the U.S. economy every year, support more than 726,000 American jobs, and generate \$12 billion in tax revenue. It is of paramount importance to invest in museums given the enormous economic and educational contributions of these institutions.”

The NSC Alliance urged appropriators to reject the President’s proposal to eliminate IMLS and to instead provide IMLS with at least \$257 million in FY 2020.

House Considers FY 2020 Funding Despite No Deal on Budget Caps

Appropriators in the U.S. House of Representatives have started to consider spending bills for fiscal year (FY) 2020. Importantly, Congress and the President have not yet reached agreement on a deal to raise the budget caps that are set to kick in later this year.

Since 2013, budget sequestration has dramatically cut funding available for federal programs that support research, environmental stewardship, education, housing, foreign aid, and other programs. Congress has since reached three budget agreements, in 2013, 2015 and 2018, to lessen the extent of sequestration. The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 expires on October 1, 2019. Several science agencies, including the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), and the National Institutes of Health (NIH), could experience cuts if the budget caps are not raised prior to FY 2020.

The House and Senate leadership have begun discussions with the White House on a possible two-year budget deal. Although it is still unclear how the budget cap negotiations will play out, House appropriators are pushing forward with their own spending plan.

The House Appropriations Committee advanced the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, their first spending bill for FY 2020, on May 8. The bill includes \$189.9 billion in discretionary funding, an increase of \$11.8 billion above the 2019 enacted level and \$48 billion above the President's budget request for FY 2020. The National Institutes of Health would receive \$41.1 billion in FY 2020, an increase of \$2 billion over the FY 2019 enacted level. The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), slated for closure under the President's budget, would receive \$257 million, an increase of \$15 million.

The House Appropriations panel has also approved topline spending numbers for each of the twelve appropriations subcommittees, allocating increases to all 12 spending bills relative to FY 2019 enacted levels. The spending number for Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies, which includes the National Science Foundation, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Institute of Standards and Technology, and National Aeronautics and Space Administration, would increase by \$2.3 billion to \$66.4 billion. The Energy and Water Development allocation, which includes funding for the Department of Energy Office of Science, would get a boost of \$1.8 billion over FY 2019. The panel has also approved spending increases for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies (+\$1.7 billion) and Agriculture (+\$1.3 billion).

On May 15, the House spending panel on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies advanced their FY 2020 appropriations bill that would boost funding for the Department of the Interior (+\$833 million) and the Environmental Protection Agency (+\$ 672 million) in FY 2020. The bill would provide \$1.24 billion (+\$75 million) for USGS, \$1.4 billion (+\$66 million) for the Bureau of Land Management, \$1.7 billion (+\$79 million) for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and \$3.4 billion for National Park Service (+\$168 million). The Smithsonian Institution would receive \$1.07 billion, an increase of \$28 million above FY 2019.

The Senate has yet to begin marking up spending bills for FY 2020. Republican appropriators in the Senate have expressed an interest in reaching a bipartisan, bicameral agreement on discretionary spending caps before starting work on appropriations.

White House Releases Guidance on Use of Science in Rulemaking

The White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has released new guidance on the quality of information to be used in rulemaking by federal agencies.

In an April 24 [memo](#) to the heads of federal agencies and departments, Acting OMB Director Russell Vought provided updated standards for agencies to use to comply with the Information Quality Act. The guidance updates implementation of the current information quality guidelines established by a 2002 OMB memo, *Guidelines for Ensuring and Maximizing the Quality, Objectivity, Utility, and Integrity of Information Disseminated by Federal Agencies*. These updates “reflect recent innovations in information generation, access, management, and use, and to help agencies address common problems with maintaining information quality.”

OMB has asked agencies to modify their definition of “influential information,” thereby changing what information qualifies to be considered when drafting rules. The new guidance intends to put in place a more rigorous review process to determine the “fitness of scientific information for policy purposes.”

OMB is also directing agencies to make more data and methods, including the computer code used in data analyses, publicly accessible, so that third parties can reproduce the findings underlying rulemaking. The “reproducibility standard” for influential information is intended to “increase the credibility of federal decisions.”

The updates modify how agencies respond to “requests for correction” (RFC) from the public. Under current guidelines, RFCs can be submitted by a member of the public when certain information “does not comply with agency guidelines.” There is also an opportunity to appeal the agency’s initial decision on an RFC. Under the new guidance, agencies would be required to respond to such requests with technical “point-by-point” answers within 120 days to reflect more “realistic timelines” and not “opine on the requestor's or the agency's policy position.” Additionally, agencies would be required to share draft responses to RFCs and appeals with OMB prior to sending them to the requestor for “assessment of compliance.”

According to critics, the OMB guidance is similar to the Environmental Protection Agency’s “Strengthening Transparency in Regulatory Science” [rule](#), proposed in 2018, which would have barred the use of scientific studies in drafting new regulations unless the underlying data were publicly available in a manner “sufficient for independent validation.” The memo also does not provide details about the process and costs associated with implementing the updates, another concern pointed out by critics.

Agencies have been directed to update within 90 days their own specific guidelines on information quality based on the parameters provided by the memo.

UN Panel Warns of Unprecedented Species Extinction

A new report by the United Nation's (UN) Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) warns that about a million species of plants and animals worldwide face extinction within the next few decades.

“Nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history - and the rate of species extinctions is accelerating, with grave impacts on people around the world now likely,” warned the report, released on May 6, 2019.

According to the [report](#), land-use change resulting from agriculture and urban developments and disruption of marine environments are the biggest threats to species. “More than a third of the world's land surface and nearly 75 percent of freshwater resources are now devoted to crop or livestock production,” the report states. Urban areas have more than doubled since 1992 and 66 percent of the marine environment has been significantly altered by humans.

Other drivers of biodiversity loss include direct exploitation of organisms, climate change, pollution, and invasive species. The report concludes that climate change is a “direct driver that is increasingly exacerbating the impact of other drivers on nature and human well-being.”

The panel asserts that current efforts to prevent the loss of biodiversity are failing and that most of the Aichi Biodiversity [Targets](#) set for 2020 under the UN Convention on Biodiversity will not be met, although some progress is possible.

The authors urge governments across the globe to address the global loss of biodiversity along with anthropogenic climate change. The report, by 7 lead co-authors from universities across the world, suggests that if no action is taken to reduce the intensity of drivers of biodiversity loss, “there will be a further acceleration in the global rate of species extinction, which is already at least tens to hundreds of times higher than it has averaged over the past 10 million years.”

The report is a result of a 3-year assessment done by nearly 150 authors from 50 nations. IPBES is an intergovernmental body of 132 member countries, including the U.S., which is responsible for assessing the state of biodiversity and the ecosystem services it provides in order to inform decision makers. Read a summary of the findings:

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/nature-decline-unprecedented-report/>

President Nominates Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife, and Parks

President Trump has announced his intention to nominate former energy lobbyist Robert Wallace to be the next Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife, and Parks for the Department of the Interior, a position that has remained vacant since the beginning of this Administration.

Wallace has previously served as Assistant Director of Legislative and Congressional Affairs for the National Park Service. He has also served in various positions on Capitol Hill, including

Chief of Staff to former Senator Malcolm Wallop (R-WY) and Staff Director of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

National Science Board Seeking New Members

The National Science Board (NSB) is accepting nominations for the NSB Class of 2020-2026 through May 31, 2019. NSB, the oversight and governance board of the National Science Foundation, is seeking recommendations for new Board Members from leading scientific, engineering, and educational organizations, as well as the public.

Information about the process and requirements is available at:
https://www.nsf.gov/nsb/news/news_summ.jsp?cntn_id=298427

NSF Requests Convergence Ideas

The National Science Foundation (NSF) is seeking ideas for future NSF Convergence Accelerator tracks that build on the foundational research developed by its 10 Big Ideas, or on other topics that may not relate directly to a Big Idea but that may have significant scientific and societal impact.

More information about the Request for Information and how to submit your ideas are available at:
https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2019/nsf19065/nsf19065.jsp?WT.mc_id=USNSF_25&WT.mc_ev=click

BCoN: Consider Endorsing Extended Specimen Report

Last month, members of the NSC Alliance Board of Directors participated in a National Press Club event on April 4, 2019, to celebrate the public release of the Biodiversity Collection Network's (BCoN) community-informed vision document: *Extending U.S. Biodiversity Collections to Promote Research and Education*. If you have not yet reviewed the document, we invite you to read the summary brochure and longer document which are available at <https://bcon.aibs.org/2019/04/04/bcon-report-extending-u-s-biodiversity-collections-to-promote-research-and-education/>. A special report will appear in the journal *BioScience* later this year.

NSC Alliance members are encouraged to join fellow NSC Alliance members — Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology, the KU Biodiversity Institute, Academy of Natural Sciences at Drexel University, and Occidental College, among others — in endorsing the vision document.

If your organization would like to endorse the plan, please send a PDF file of a letter on letterhead and signed by an authorized representative of your organization to BCoN care of the American Institute of Biological Sciences at publicpolicy@aibs.org.

NSC Alliance Members: Inform Science Policy This Summer

The Natural Science Collections Alliance is pleased to announce that your organization, as an Alliance member, is eligible to participate in the 2019 Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits event.

This national initiative, organized by the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS), and co-sponsored by NSC Alliance, is an opportunity for scientists from across the country to meet with their federal or state elected officials to showcase the people, facilities, and equipment that are required to support and conduct scientific research.

Now in its eleventh year, the event enables scientists, curators, museum professionals, and graduate students to meet with their elected officials without traveling to Washington, DC. Participants may either invite an elected official to tour their research facility or can meet at the lawmaker's local office. Meetings will take place mid-July through October, depending on the participant's schedule.

“When I found out about the AIBS Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits, I thought that this would be a perfect way to share not only my passion about my work but also my concerns and interests with a local government representative that might be able to influence policy and share advice about how to become even more involved,” said 2018 participant Khailee Marischuk. “I had not had any previous experience with this type of meeting, but AIBS did a fantastic job connecting me with my State Representative and preparing me for the lab tour and conversation. My meeting with Representative Terese Berceau was incredibly rewarding as she shared our enthusiasm for scientific research and our passion for promoting science policy for elected officials and the general public alike, along with giving our group insight in how best to make our voices and opinions known and heard. It was a thought-provoking discussion for me and hopefully everyone else involved.”

NSC Alliance members who participate will receive one-on-one support and online training to prepare them for their tour or meeting. The event is open to all types of natural science collections, including biological, geological, and anthropological collections.

The event is made possible by AIBS, with the support of event sponsors American Society of Plant Taxonomists, Botanical Society of America, Helminthological Society of Washington, Natural Science Collections Alliance, Paleontological Society, Society for Freshwater Science, Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections, and Society for the Study of Evolution and event supporter Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology.

Participation is free for NSC Alliance members, but registration is required and will close on July 10, 2019. For more information and to register, visit https://www.aibs.org/public-policy/congressional_district_visits.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 dbosnjak@aibs.org.