

# **NSC Alliance Washington Report**

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## **Policy News from NSC Alliance**

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. 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](mailto:rgropp@aibs.org)

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## **OSTP Issues Government-Wide Policy on Scientific Collections**

The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) has directed all federal agencies to plan for the management of their scientific collections. A memo issued by OSTP Director John Holdren on October 6, 2010, outlines the implementation of several recommendations made by the Interagency Working Group on Scientific Collections in their 2009 report. Within 12 months, agencies are directed to assess and realistically project budgets for collections care and maintenance. Additionally, agencies “are urged to share their scientific collections policies and procedures to help [other] agencies develop best practices.” Lastly, agencies are directed to collaborate to document their collections holdings and to make this information available online to the public within 36 months.

To read the memo, visit <http://nscalliance.org/?p=326>.

## **A New Director for NSF**

The Senate has confirmed President Obama's nomination of Subra Suresh to the post of director of the National Science Foundation (NSF). Suresh most recently served as dean of the School of Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). His research into the mechanical properties of engineered and biological materials has included studies of nanostructured materials and the exploration of connections between biological cell mechanics and human disease. Suresh holds a bachelor's degree from the Indian Institute of Technology, an M.S. from Iowa State University, and a Sc.D. from MIT. The Director of NSF is appointed to a six year term.

### **New Blog to Serve as Forum for Collections Digitization**

A new blog has been created to assist the biological collections community to discuss and share ideas about the National Science Foundation's solicitation for "Advancing Digitization of Biological Collections (ADBC)." The blog aims to "encourage the community to begin to communicate openly about the ADBC solicitation including questions, ideas, intentions, and other related issues." The creators of the blog hope that users will present their intentions for and philosophies behind proposed Home Uniting Biocollections (HUB) and Thematic Collections Networks (TCNs) submissions to NSF.

The blog is an outcome of the community round-table discussion hosted by the University of Colorado at Boulder on September 17, 2010. Meeting hosts Patrick Kocielek and Robert Guralnick, both of the Colorado University Museum of Natural History, have agreed to continue the round-table discussion, via the blog.

To access the blog, visit <http://nsfadbc.wordpress.com>.

### **Russian Seed Bank Receives Temporary Reprieve**

The Pavlovsk Experiment Station and its living plant collections in Russia have been threatened by plans to convert the facility into commercial development. A Russian court had rejected pleas to halt a planned land auction. However, following international expressions of concern, the facility has received a temporary reprieve. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev recently intervened in the matter and ordered a review of the proposed redevelopment plan. This has resulted in a delay of the land auction until October. Meanwhile, an independent, international commission will be established to assess the value of the plant collection. The station houses Europe's largest collection of fruits and berries. More than 90 percent of the collection is reportedly found in no other research collection or genebank.

The American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) and the Ecological Society of America (ESA) recently pressed for the preservation of the station's genetic resources. In a letter to international and United States policymakers, AIBS and ESA drew attention to the station as an irreplaceable resource for humanity. The groups further warned that the loss of the genetic information held in the collection would reduce options for adaptation to future plant diseases, environmental changes, or the need for increased agricultural productivity.

AIBS and ESA also called attention to the threats facing natural science collections around the world due to lack of funding, loss of technically trained staff, and inadequate protection against natural disasters. The two scientific societies recommended that governmental and non-governmental organizations that fund scientific research increase investments in the physical and human infrastructure of living and non-living natural science collections. “Scientific collections should not be sacrificed for short-term economic gains nor allowed to slowly degrade by lack of funding. It is imperative that governments around the world recognize the value of these collections and act accordingly,” warned AIBS and ESA. To read the joint letter, visit [http://www.aibs.org/position-statements/20100916aibsesa\\_statem.html](http://www.aibs.org/position-statements/20100916aibsesa_statem.html).

## **Storm Clouds Build, NAS Releases Gathering Storm II**

On September 23, 2010, the National Academies released a new report warning that “America’s ability to compete for quality jobs in the global economy continues to deteriorate, and the nation needs a sustained investment in education and basic research to spur innovation and keep its competitive position from slipping further.” The warning was issued in “Rising Above the Gathering Storm, Revisited: Rapidly Approaching Category 5,” a report prepared by some of the authors of the influential 2005 report “Rising Above the Gather Storm.”

The new warning was released at a briefing in the United States Capitol Building. On hand for the release were Senators Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) and Lamar Alexander (R-TN), and Representatives Bart Gordon (D-TN) and Frank Wolf (R-VA). Some members of Congress have said the report provides further reasons to enact legislation to reauthorize the America COMPETES Act of 2007, which is set to expire this year. The America COMPETES Act authorized recommendations from the original Gathering Storm report, but many of these recommendations have not been fully funded.

The new report is available online at [http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record\\_id=12999](http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12999).

## **Act Now – Ask Your Senators to Pass America COMPETES Act Reauthorization This Year**

Investing in basic research, improving science education, and supporting graduate fellowships — these are central elements for a vibrant scientific workforce. However, many programs supported by the National Science Foundation, the Department of Energy Office of Science, and other federal agencies are at risk because of the pending expiration of the America COMPETES Act.

First enacted in 2007, the law aims to stimulate innovation and improve science education by increasing funding authorizations for federal agencies that support basic research. To date, the law has increased funding for NSF and established science education programs that are enriching the education of students in K-12, college, and graduate school.

Congress is currently considering legislation to reauthorize the America COMPETES Act. The legislation passed the House of Representatives with bipartisan support in June, but the Senate has yet to act.

You can send a letter to your Senators asking them to pass a reauthorization of the America COMPETES Act this year by going to <http://capwiz.com/aibs/issues/alert/?alertid=18156501>.

### **New Initiative Aims to Incorporate Collections into Undergraduate Education**

AIM-UP! (Advancing the Integration of Museums into Undergraduate Programs) is a recently funded NSF Research Coordination Network focused on new ways of incorporating the extensive archives and cyberinfrastructure of natural history museums into undergraduate education. There are five primary themes: Complex Biotic Associations Across Space and Time, Geographic Variation, Evolutionary Dynamics of Genomes, Biotic Response to Climate Change, and Co-evolving Communities of Pathogens and Hosts as Related to Emerging Diseases.

AIM-UP! is refining existing efforts and developing new integrated approaches to collections-based training in large-scale questions using the combined and broad-based expertise of educators, curators, collection managers, database managers, and scientists whose teaching and investigations span various disciplines and relate to topics covering a wide spectrum of time and space. Although AIM-UP! began as a collaboration between the University of Alaska, Harvard University, the University of California at Berkeley, and the University of New Mexico as a way to integrate expertise and experiences across these institutions, it is being expanded to other educational institutions, federal agencies, Latin American institutions, and a large museum-based genetic consortium in Canada.

If you are interested in finding out more about the activities and objectives of AIM-UP! please visit the website at: <https://sites.google.com/site/laimup/> or contact Gordon Jarrell at [gordon.jarrell@gmail.com](mailto:gordon.jarrell@gmail.com) or Joseph Cook at [tucojoe@gmail.com](mailto:tucojoe@gmail.com).

### **Herbarium Specimens Provide Potential Wealth of Climate Impact Data**

New research published in the *Journal of Ecology* demonstrates one of the many values of natural history collections. Researchers in the United Kingdom have shown that preserved plant specimens can be used in place of field observations to determine the impacts of climate change on phenology. The team compared specimens of early spider orchids (*Ophrys sphegodes*) from several collections with field observations of the species. They found that the flowering times inferred from the herbarium specimens matched the observations of earlier flowering in nature. According to the paper's co-author Tony Davy, the data "enables us to predict what the effects of a change in climate are going to be," which is especially useful when field observation are not available. Given the large number of specimens in collections around the world, the potential exists for a huge amount of information, according to Davy. To read the article published by BBC, visit <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-11377192>.

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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](http://www.NSCAlliance.org).

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