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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.

Congress Finally Funds Federal Agencies for FY 2012

After months of negotiations, Congress finally approved a \$915 billion deal to fund a major portion of the federal government through fiscal year (FY) 2012. The so-called ‘megabus’—a collection of nine appropriations bills—will fund the Departments of Defense, Energy, Education, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Interior, Labor, and State, as well as numerous independent agencies. The legislation (HR 2055) won bipartisan support in both chambers of Congress and was signed into law by President Obama last week.

Notably, the megabus includes a second consecutive year of budget cuts for many programs. According to documents from Republican members of the House Appropriations Committee: “When all FY 2012 Appropriations legislation is complete, Congress will have cut discretionary spending for two straight years in a row - the first time this has occurred in modern history. In fact, the enactment of the final Appropriations legislation will mark a savings of nearly \$31 billion in total discretionary spending compared to last year’s level and a savings of \$95 billion compared to FY 2010.”

Despite overall budget reductions, several agencies will receive increased funding. For instance, military spending will increase by \$5.1 billion over last year’s level. Most programs, however, will not receive the amount of funding requested by the Obama Administration earlier this year. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) will receive an increase of \$299 million, for a total spending level of \$30.7 billion. Congress also made clear that it wants NIH to continue to spend 90 percent of its budget on external grants.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services will receive \$232.4 million, a reduction of \$5 million. Museum programs within the agency will receive \$29.5 million.

Spending for the Smithsonian Institution will be increased by \$51.9 million to \$811.5 million. All of the increase is designated for facilities, including the start of construction of the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Funding for the Department of Energy Office of Science will increase by \$46 million to \$4.9 billion. Despite a push by the House to cut funding for Biological and Environment Research, the program will operate with the same funding level it had last year.

Most science and environmental programs will be funded at smaller levels than in FY 2011. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will be cut by \$233 million, including a six percent reduction to clean air and climate research programs. Congress included funds for EPA to conduct a long-term evaluation of the agency's laboratory network to "ensure the current organization matches the Agency's strategic needs." This directive follows a recommendation made by the Government Accountability Office.

Within the Department of the Interior, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) will lose \$13.9 million. The Ecosystems division will be essentially flat funded, although programmatic funding within the division will change. Monitoring, fisheries, and Cooperative Research Units will be trimmed slightly so that programs on invasive species, and terrestrial, freshwater, and marine environments can be increased by 21 percent and 2.9 percent, respectively. Climate Science Centers will receive \$4.6 million in new funding, but climate research and development will be cut by \$6.4 million.

The budget for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will remain at \$1.5 billion. Although the National Wildlife Refuges will be trimmed 1.1 percent, cooperative landscape conservation and adaptive science will increase slightly. The Cooperative Endangered Species Fund will be cut by \$12.1 million relative to last year. Funding for the National Park Service will also remain essentially flat at \$2.6 billion.

Forest and Rangeland Research at the United States Forest Service will be reduced by 3.5 percent.

The House of Representatives also passed a bill that would have further reduced FY 2012 discretionary spending by 1.8 percent in order to offset the costs of a disaster relief package. The Senate, however, balked at the offsets and rejected the measure.

Increases for Small Business Programs to Come at Expense of Research

Congress has agreed to increase funding for two programs that help small businesses translate scientific discoveries into commercial ventures. The Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs would receive a larger share of federal research dollars under the bicameral compromise.

Currently, the programs are funded by the 11 federal agencies that spend more than \$100 million a year on research. The SBIR receives 2.5 percent of each agency's research budget; STTR receives 0.3 percent. The new deal would increase those allocations to 3.2 percent and 0.45 percent, respectively, for the next six years.

Some members of the research community are unhappy about the reauthorization because they worry it will reduce the funding available for research.

Reminder: Science Policy Opportunity for Graduate Students

The AIBS Emerging Public Policy Leadership Award (EPPLA) recognizes graduate students in the biological sciences with an interest and aptitude for working at the intersection of science and public policy.

EPPLA winners will receive a free trip to Washington, DC, to participate in the 2012 BESC Congressional Visits Day on 28-29 March 2012.

Applications must be received by 20 January 2012.

Information about the application process is available at: http://www.aibs.org/public-policy/student_opportunities.html.

Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative Requests Grant Proposals

On 15 December 2011, the Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative (GoMRI) Research Board issued a new request for proposals, RFP-II, which will provide up to \$7.5 million per year for research grants to individual investigators or small groups of researchers. The funding is part of BP's commitment to provide \$500 million over ten years to support independent scientific research into the effects of the Deepwater Horizon incident on the Gulf of Mexico and to develop innovative new technologies and tools to respond to and mitigate future oil spills.

It is anticipated that grants awarded through the RFP-II competition will range between \$100,000 and \$1,000,000 per year. Grants may be awarded for a one to three year period. Individuals and small groups interested in submitting a grant application should consult RFP-II (<http://www.gulfresearchinitiative.org/request-for-proposals/rfp-ii/>) for specific guidelines and requirements. A Letter of Intent must be submitted by 9:00 p.m. EST on 17 January 2012.

Senator Coburn Once Again Calls Federal Funding of Museums, NSF 'Wasteful'

Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK) has once again issued a report on what he considers to be "some of the most wasteful and low priority government spending of 2011." The report, which was prepared by the Senator's office, highlights \$6.9 billion in federal expenditures that the Senator

believes should not have been spent this year.

“This report details 100 of the countless unnecessary, duplicative, or just plain stupid projects spread throughout the federal government and paid for with your tax dollars this year that highlight the out-of-control and shortsighted spending excesses in Washington,” writes Senator Coburn in the report’s introduction.

Numerous examples of so-called ‘wasteful’ spending entail funding for museums and social science research funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF). Examples include:

- \$149,990 from NSF for the development of a video game that teaches students about evolution.
- \$24,632 from the National Endowment for the Humanities for the development of a 3-D museum exhibit at the Milwaukee Public Museum that shows visitors the virtual unwrapping of a mummy.
- \$300,000 for the creation of podcasts about scientific research that takes place in National Parks in Alaska.
- \$169,567 for archeological surveys of five shipwrecks in Wisconsin, funded by the Federal Highway Administration.
- \$200,000 to study how the electorate responds to candidates' positions on climate change.

Museum exhibits on steamboats, carriages, skiing, magic, and video games were highlighted in the report.

Senator Coburn has developed several other reports in the past two years on ‘wasteful’ spending.

New Dinosaur Species Discovered in Museum Collection

Fragments of a fossilized skull collected nearly a century ago have been identified as a new species of dinosaur. The fossils sat in obscurity in The Natural History Museum of London after they were collected by a father and son pair in southern Alberta, Canada in 1916. Recently, researchers rediscovered the fossils and realized that they belonged to a new species, which was named *Spinops sternbergorum* in honor of the fossil collectors.

“I was amazed to learn the story behind these specimens, and how they went unstudied for so long,” said Andrew Farke, the curator of paleontology at the Raymond M. Alf Museum of Paleontology in Claremont, California, and lead author on the study that described *Spinops*. “This study highlights the importance of museum collections for understanding the history of our planet,” Farke continued. “My colleagues and I were pleasantly surprised to find these fossils on the museum shelf, and even more astonished when we determined that they were a previously unknown species of dinosaur.”

French Museum Launches Digital Library

The Musee Associatif D'Histoire Naturelle in France has digitized over 23,000 documents, which are now available online in the museum's Digital Library. Included in the online repository are numerous old and rare books and plates on zoology, botany, and entomology. Learn more at <http://t.ymlp334.net/hwalaesheanawbadauehbh/click.php>.

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.

Note: You are receiving a copy of this electronic report as part of your membership in the NSC Alliance. Contact the Alliance office with any email address or member representative name changes send an email to spotter@aibs.org.