

## NSC Alliance Washington Report, Volume 4, Issue 3, March 15, 2013

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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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### Scientists Call for Greater Access to Biodiversity Resources, Data

A new report outlines the requirements for implementing the Network Integrated Biocollections Alliance to increase research productivity, solve societal problems, and drive innovation. The report was the outcome of a workshop of experts that was convened last fall to outline the steps needed to build a Network Integrated Biocollections Alliance (NIBA) in the next ten years. NIBA is a national scientific, engineering, and data management initiative first called for in 2010. When built, NIBA will provide online access to digitized data for biological specimens held in natural history museums, university science departments, and government laboratories, among other repositories.

The experts' workshop was convened by the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) with support from the National Science Foundation. NSC Alliance board members were among the workshop participants and report authors.

NIBA is a coordinated, large-scale and sustained effort to digitize the nation's biological collections in order to make their data and images available through the Internet. The *Implementation Plan for a Network Integrated Biocollections Alliance* ([www.aibs.org/public-policy/biocollections.html](http://www.aibs.org/public-policy/biocollections.html)) "provides a detailed roadmap to achieve a vital national goal, which will be extremely important in coping with consequences of climate change, invasive species, pollution and other major environmental problems," said Dr. James Hanken, director of Harvard University's Museum of Comparative Zoology and an author of the report.

In 2010, the scientific community developed a *Strategic Plan* for NIBA. The *Strategic Plan* has been well received, but the scientific community also recognized a need to augment the *Strategic Plan* by identifying the key steps, milestones, and stakeholders required to fully achieve its goals. Thus, AIBS convened a workshop to develop an *Implementation Plan* for NIBA. Both documents have emerged from the biocollections community and have been widely informed through workshops of experts. The broader scientific community and the public have also provided input that informed the final *Implementation Plan*.

“Scientists are eager to see the NIBA implemented,” said Dr. Lucinda McDade, Interim Executive Director of Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden and an author of the report. Hanken concurs and notes that NIBA is required to help move research forward and to ensure that policymakers and the public have access to the information they need to make informed decisions.

“This report strongly emphasizes research applications while also highlighting important educational components and focusing on workforce training that will be necessary to achieve and sustain NIBA,” said McDade.

The National Science Foundation already is showing earnest commitment to achieving many of the goals identified in the report through several current funding initiatives, notes Hanken. “Full implementation of NIBA will require additional investments by other federal and state agencies that hold major biocollections.”

The report identifies many specific activities that can and should be led by individual scientific societies, biocollections institutions, federal and state agencies, colleges and universities, and other consumers of digitized data.

The *Implementation Plan* includes detailed recommendations to:

1. Establish an organizational and governance structure that will provide the national leadership and decision-making mechanism required to implement NIBA and to fully realize its Strategic Plan.
2. Advance engineering of the US biocollections cyberinfrastructure.
3. Enhance the training of existing collections staff and to create the next generation of biodiversity information managers.
4. Increase support for and participation in NIBA by the research community and a broad spectrum of stakeholders.
5. Establish an enduring and sustainable knowledge base.
6. Infuse specimen-based learning and exploration into formal and informal education.

“We urge all stakeholders to join the NIBA effort,” said McDade.

The Strategic Plan for NIBA is at <http://digbiocol.wordpress.com/brochure/>.

The Implementation Plan for NIBA is at [www.aibs.org/public-policy/biocollections.html](http://www.aibs.org/public-policy/biocollections.html).

## Sequestration Cuts Take Effect

On 1 March 2013, federal budget cuts that — according to the White House and members of Congress — were not meant to happen, began. Sequestration — \$85 billion in across-the-board budget cuts to nearly all federal agencies — was meant as a threat to force congressional action to reduce the federal budget deficit. For a year and half, lawmakers have bemoaned how terrible the impacts of sequestration would be. Yet, as the deadline approached for action, little effort was made to further delay or avert the spending reductions, which some have compared to using a meat cleaver instead of a scalpel to cut spending.

Non-defense programs, including agencies that support science, will be cut by about 9 percent over the next seven months. Defense funding will be cut by 13 percent in the remainder of fiscal year 2013. An additional \$700 billion in sequestration cuts will occur over the next decade unless current law is changed.

The White House Office of Management and Budget has estimated the impacts of sequestration to federal programs.

- The National Science Foundation will cut \$290 million from its research budget, resulting in roughly 1,000 fewer research grants this year. Education programs will lose \$47 million.
- Within the Department of Agriculture, the Agricultural Research Service, will lose \$55 million and extramural research will be cut by \$36 million this year.
- Funding for research at the United States Geological Survey will decline by \$54 million.
- The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration will lose \$165 million from its operations, research, and facilities account.
- The budget for the Department of Energy Office of Science will be cut by \$245 million.
- Science and technology at the Environmental Protection Agency will decrease by \$40 million.
- The budget for the National Institutes of Health will decline by \$1.6 billion.
- Research and development programs at the Department of Defense will be cut by \$1.6 billion.

On 28 February, the Senate voted on two competing proposals to avert sequestration this fiscal year. Both plans failed to garner the necessary number of votes. The proposal backed by Senate Democrats sought to avert sequestration for the remainder of the year through higher taxes on the wealthy, new tax revenue from oil extraction from tar sands, and spending reductions in agriculture subsidies and defense. Senate Republicans backed a plan that would have allowed President Obama more flexibility in how to apply the cuts instead of the current requirement to make cuts across-the-board.

Lawmakers have now shifted their focus to dealing with funding the federal government for the remainder of fiscal year 2013, which ends on 30 September 2013. The current funding law expires on 27 March, after which a government shutdown would occur if no new agreement were enacted.

The House of Representatives passed a bill to fund nearly all federal agencies at sequester-reduced levels for the rest of the fiscal year. Although non-defense programs would not be granted leeway in regards to the automatic cuts, the Department of Defense would be given some flexibility in how the cuts are allocated. HR 933 passed 267 to 151, with 53 Democrats in support and 14 Republicans against.

The Senate is considering a measure this week that would fund most of the government at current reduced levels until October. A handful of agencies, including the National Science Foundation, would receive an increase over fiscal year 2012 levels. Once sequestration is accounted for, however, these agencies would still be subject to a budget reduction.

### **NSC Alliance and iDigBio Sponsor Symposium at 2013 SPNHC Meetings**

On Thursday, 20 June 2013, NSC Alliance and iDigBio will sponsor a symposium on digitization and dissemination of natural history data. The symposium is broken out into two sessions. The morning program will be an introduction to digitization and dissemination of data and will focus on iDigBio and other initiatives. The afternoon session will focus on diverse uses of natural history collections data.

For more information about the symposium, the SPNHC meetings, or to register for the conference, please visit <http://cfrspnhc2013.com/idigbio-and-nsca-symposium.html>.

### **Federal Agencies Directed to Develop Open Access Policies**

On 22 February, the Office of Science and Technology Policy directed the heads of federal agencies to each develop a plan to support increased public access to the results of research funded by the federal government. This includes any results published in peer-reviewed scholarly journals and digital scientific data that are based on research that directly arises from federal funds.

The requirement applies to federal agencies that support over \$100 million in annual research and development; this includes the National Science Foundation, Departments of Agriculture and Energy, National Institutes of Health, and Environmental Protection Agency, among others.

Agencies were instructed to leverage existing archives for posting final peer-reviewed manuscripts or final published documents. A 12-month embargo period after publication is suggested as a guideline, but agencies can tailor their individual plans. Moreover, agencies must provide a mechanism for stakeholders to petition to change the embargo period for a specific scientific discipline.

Agencies have six months to devise their draft plans for complying with the memo.

### **Conference to Consider 'De-Extinction' of Lost Species**

The potential of reviving extinct species and re-introducing them into the wild may seem like something out of the movie “Jurassic Park,” but some scientists and environmentalists are engaged in an effort to do just that.

The topic of ‘de-extinction’ will be considered in a daylong public forum to be held on 15 March 2013 in Washington, DC.

One of the speakers, Ben Novak of the University of California, Santa Cruz, has been working to extract DNA from specimens of passenger pigeons in the hopes of recreating a species that has been extinct for a century.

Other presenters will address the methods to resurrect species and the ethics of such activities.

The event will be webcast live at <http://longnow.org/revive/tedxdeextinction/webcast/>.

### **Upcoming NAGPRA Events**

The National Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Program will hold a webinar on 2 April 2013 on identification of aboriginal lands. Under federal law, museums and federal agency officials must consult with Indian tribes from whose aboriginal land human remains and other cultural items were removed. Register for the event at <https://www.livemeeting.com/lrs/8000963084/Registration.aspx?pageName=7111x2nwqg6m8c0w>.

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Review Committee will meet on 22 May 2013 from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm EDT. Members of the public are welcome to join the conference call. Those wishing to present public comment must register for the meeting and sign up to speak. To register for the meeting, please send an email to [NAGPRA@rap.midco.net](mailto:NAGPRA@rap.midco.net) by 17 May 2013.

### **NSC Alliance Board Meeting to be Held in June**

The next meeting of the NSC Alliance Board of Directors will be held on Wednesday, 19 June 2013 from 10 a.m. to noon (central time) in Rapid City, South Dakota at the 2013 annual meeting of the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections (SPNHC). The board meeting is the day before the NSC Alliance - iDigBio sponsored symposium on digitization and dissemination of natural history data. For more information on the symposium, please see <http://cfrspnhc2013.com/idigbio-and-nsca-symposium.html>. This link also provides information about the SPNHC meeting and registering for the meeting.

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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).

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](mailto:spotter@aibs.org).