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In this Issue:

- NSC Alliance, AIBS, and SPNHC Offer Information on Big Data
 - Proposed NSCA Board Slate: Additional Nominations Accepted Until September 28, 2013
 - Scientists Meet with Federal and State Policymakers
 - Two Upcoming Workshops on Digitization
 - Los Angeles Museum Redefines Expectations of Natural History
 - Museum Specimens Document Growing Mammal Brains
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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.

NSC Alliance, AIBS, and SPNHC Offer Information on Big Data

Three scientific organizations dedicated to the preservation and use of biocollections have provided comments to the federal government about digitization of natural history collections as part of ‘big data.’ The letter to the National Coordination Office (NCO) for Networking and Information Technology Research and Development outlines the Network Integrated Biocollections Alliance (NIBA), an initiative developed by the scientific community that will contribute to and benefit from big data collaborations. The letter responded to a request for information on Big Data high-impact collaborations and areas for expanded collaboration between the public and private sectors.

An excerpt of the letter, signed by the presidents of the Natural Science Collections Alliance, American Institute of Biological Sciences, and Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections, follows:

“The NIBA is a national scientific, engineering, and data mobilization initiative. When fully realized, NIBA will provide online access to digitized data for biological specimens held in natural history museums, university science departments, and government laboratories across the United States. Scientists have amassed and curated more than one billion specimens in more than 2,500 institutions across the United States. Once digitized, these specimens will represent millions or even billions of data points. These specimens and their associated data are maintained for research and education and to inform wise decisions about the environment, public health, food security, and commerce.”

Read the full letter at <http://nscalliance.org/?p=675>.

Proposed NSCA Board Slate: Additional Nominations Accepted Until September 28, 2013

Annual NSCA Board elections are getting underway, as per the NSCA Bylaws, which state: “The Nominating Committee shall furnish the names of nominees to the Secretary, who shall circulate them either in written or electronic form (e.g., web site) to the members at least thirty (30) days in advance of the election in order to provide for additional names to be nominated by the membership. Nomination to the ballot from the membership requires written support from 10 members from any category of membership.”

View the slate of candidates proposed by the Nominating Committee at <http://nscalliance.org/?p=673>. Additional nominations (with written support from 10 members) may be sent to the Nominating Committee Chair, Larry Page, at lpage@flmnh.ufl.edu.

An online ballot for membership voting will be posted after nominations close.

Scientists Meet with Federal and State Policymakers

In August, biological researchers and educators participated in the *5th Annual Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits* event. This nationwide event, sponsored by the Natural Science Collections Alliance, enabled scientists to meet with their members of Congress in their local area rather than in Washington, DC, and allowed elected officials to learn first-hand about the scientists and research facilities in their district.

Scientists participating in the event discussed the importance of life sciences research with the individuals responsible for casting the votes that shape the nation’s science policy.

Highlights of the event include:

- U.S. Representative Ted Yoho (R-FL) will visit Ordway-Swisher Biological Station in September.
- U.S. Congresswoman Vicky Hartzler (R-MO) will visit the campus of the University of Central Missouri.
- Representative Gloria Negrete McLeod (D-CA) will tour a lab at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona.
- Participants met with five other members of Congress at district offices, including Representatives Mike Doyle (D-PA), Elizabeth Esty (D-CT), Mike Honda (D-CA), Bill Foster (D-IL), Mark Meadows (R-NC), and Scott Peters (D-CA).
- Meetings with five state officials from Iowa, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Virginia.
- Tours of research facilities were organized for staff of Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM) and staff of Representatives Ann Kuster (D-NH), Tom McClintock (R-CA), Austin Scott (R-GA), and Filemon Vela (D-TX).
- Meetings were also arranged with staff for Representatives Jim Bridenstine (R-OK), Matt Cartwright (D-PA), Ron DeSantis (R-FL), John Garamendi (D-CA), Robert Goodlatte (R-VA), George Holding (R-NC), Patrick Kennedy (D-MA), Raul Labrador (R-ID),

Doug LaMalfa (R-CA), Sean Maloney (D-NY), Patrick Murphy (D-FL), Scott Perry (R-PA), Bill Posey (R-FL), Tim Ryan (D-OH), Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ), and Mark Takano (D-CA).

Over 100 scientists took part in the event. Individuals from 34 states signed up to meet with their elected officials. Participants ranged from graduate students to senior researchers and educators.

Individuals in the 2013 event participated in an interactive training webinar. The program provided information about how best to communicate science to non-technical audiences, tips for conducting a successful meeting with an elected official, and information about trends in funding for research.

The 5th *Annual Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits* were made possible by the American Institute of Biological Sciences and Entomological Society of America, with support from event sponsors: American Society of Naturalists, Botanical Society of America, Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology, Natural Science Collections Alliance, Organization of Biological Field Stations, and Society for the Study of Evolution.

The 6th annual event will be held in August 2014. More information will be posted in spring 2014 at http://www.aibs.org/public-policy/congressional_district_visits.html.

Two Upcoming Workshops on Digitization

iDigBio will host two workshops in September on digitization of biological specimens. Both training events will be accessible online.

A workshop on fluid-preserved invertebrate and microscopic slide imaging will be held on 17-18 September 2013. The primary goal is to prepare participants for imaging these difficult to record collection objects. More information is available at https://www.idigbio.org/wiki/index.php/Fluid_Preserved_Invertebrate_Imaging. Link to webinar access: <http://idigbio.adobeconnect.com/invertimaging>

Digitizing Paleo Collections will be held on 24-25 September 2013. The primary goal is to prepare participants with the necessary skills and knowledge to launch or maintain a digitization program individually, through collaboration with an existing Thematic Collections Network or Partner with an Existing Network, or through collaboration with iDigBio. More information is available at https://www.idigbio.org/wiki/images/c/c3/PaleontologyDigitizationWorkshopAgenda_%281%29.pdf. Link to webinar access: <http://idigbio.adobeconnect.com/paleo>

Los Angeles Museum Redefines Expectations of Natural History

The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County is redefining public expectations. In addition to displaying fossils, the museum has added exhibits of live animals, such as turtles and snakes. One of the new exhibits looks at how people have influenced the environment in the Los Angeles area.

“Not only are we interpreting natural history. We also, as a part of our mission statement, are interpreting cultural history as well,” Jonathan Gillett, the museum’s assistant collections manager, told Voice of America. “So it shows the way that the environment has influenced people and how people have influenced the environment.”

Learn more at <http://www.voanews.com/content/los-angeles-natural-history-museum-redefined/1726924.html>.

Museum Specimens Document Growing Mammal Brains

The brain size of some mammal species is getting larger, possibly due to human alterations in the natural environment. University of Minnesota biologist Emilie C. Snell-Rood studied a collection of mammal skulls at the Bell Museum of Natural History at the University of Minnesota. Dr. Snell-Rood studied ten species of small mammals, including mice, shrews, bats, and gophers. Using skulls that were collected over the past century, her research team documented a six percent increase in brain size in white-footed mice and meadow voles collected in cities or suburbs, as compared to animals from rural areas. Dr. Snell-Rood also found an increase in brain size in four species from rural parts of Minnesota.

Read the article published in the New York Times at http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/22/science/as-humans-change-landscape-brains-of-some-animals-change-too.html?ref=science&_r=0.

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.