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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 Releases New Resource on Importance of Fossils to Research

The Natural Science Collections Alliance has prepared a short report on how fossils are used in scientific research. “Celebrating the Knowledge and the Mystery of Fossils” shows how researchers use fossils to understand evolution of species and reconstruct Earth’s ancient climate.

“Fossil collections are extremely important for those of us who study evolutionary biology because 99 percent of species lived in the past, by some estimates,” explains Dr. Judith E. Skog, professor emeritus at George Mason University. “If we did not understand these organisms and their environments, we would have a skewed view of evolutionary processes.”

Download a free copy of the issue brief at http://nscalliance.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/nsca_fossils.pdf. Access other reports in NSC Alliance’s series “On the Importance of Scientific Collections” at http://nscalliance.org/?page_id=10.

Small Expectations for Budget Conference

A new round of congressional budget talks began on 30 October, but both political parties are downplaying hopes for a broad budget deal. Many lawmakers and political insiders expect a small-scale plan from the budget committee formed by the deal to reopen the federal government

after a 16-day shutdown. The group of 29 members of Congress has until 13 December to negotiate a deal.

Several members of the conference committee have expressed a desire to find a replacement for the automatic spending cuts known as budget sequestration. In federal fiscal year 2014, the sequester will reduce federal spending by about \$20 billion from current levels.

“A deal that redid the sequester for a short period of time is something we could talk about,” said Representative Chris Van Hollen (D-Maryland), who serves as ranking member of the House Budget Committee. House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (R-Wisconsin) has also suggested that he would like to replace budget sequestration.

One issue for the negotiators, as in past budget talks, will be how to decrease the deficit. Republicans have insisted on balancing the budget by cutting spending, not through raising new revenues. Meanwhile, Democrats largely oppose changes to costly entitlement programs, such as Social Security.

Draft Rule Addresses Unclaimed Native American Remains and Objects

The Department of the Interior has proposed new procedures for the disposition of unclaimed human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony discovered on federal lands after 16 November 1990. The rule would only apply to remains and objects whose disposition of ownership or control has not occurred because no claimant has exercised its right to claim ownership or control of the cultural items, or no potential claimant can reasonably be identified.

Federal agencies would be required to inventory their unclaimed cultural items and submit the list to the National Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Program within two years of the rule being finalized or within two years of excavating the items. The rule also sets out specific standards for care of unclaimed cultural items.

Public comments will be accepted through 30 December 2013. Read the draft rule at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2013-10-29/html/2013-25511.htm>.

House Science Committee Prepares to Reauthorize Innovation Legislation

After months of behind the scenes work, the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee is moving forward with its effort to reauthorize a broad science innovation and education law, the America COMPETES Act.

The Committee recently released a discussion draft of the “Frontiers in Innovation, Research, Science, and Technology (FIRST) Act,” which is a replacement for the National Science Foundation title of COMPETES. The legislation would require grants funded by NSF satisfy one or more of six goals: increased economic competitiveness, advancement of the health and

welfare of the American public, development of a scientific workforce and increased public scientific literacy, support for national defense, and increased partnerships between academia and industry. The bill would also reform existing regulations that universities claim are burdensome.

The Committee is simultaneously considering legislation to increase funding for basic energy science by 1.7 percent within two years. The FIRST Act does not include specific authorization levels for NSF.

The America COMPETES Act was enacted six years ago and authorized increased funding for NSF, the Department of Energy Office of Science, and the laboratories of the National Institute of Standards and Technology. New funding levels were set in 2010, but that legislation passed the House without the broad bipartisan support of the original law.

In November, the Senate Commerce Committee held its first hearing on the topic, but has not yet released any legislation.

Transparency Legislation Could Reveal Sensitive Scientific Information

The House of Representatives appears poised to fast track legislation that would require federal agencies to use a merit-based selection process to award grants. Although most federal scientific programs currently award research funds on a competitive basis, other federal agencies do not. The bill's sponsor, Representative James Lankford (R-OK), told *Science Insider* that the bill is not aimed at science agencies and "would not change" how those agencies operate.

The provisions that concern the scientific community are the requirements for federal agencies to post information online about grants that are funded, including a copy of the proposal, award decision documentation and rankings, justification for deviating from rankings, disclosure of peer reviewers, and disclosure of other grant reviewers.

HR 3316 was introduced on 23 October 2013 and was approved by the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform a week later.

NSF Announces Solicitation for Environmental Biology Research

Today, the National Science Foundation (NSF) posted a new solicitation for core proposals to the Division of Environmental Biology. The solicitation, 14-503, is available at <http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2014/nsf14503/nsf14503.htm>.

NSF also issued a reminder to proposers that a revised version of the NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide (PAPPG), [NSF 13-1](#), was issued on 4 October 2012 and is currently in effect. Researchers should be aware that significant changes were made to the PAPPG to implement revised merit review criteria based on the National Science Board (NSB) report, [National Science Foundation's Merit Review Criteria: Review and Revisions](#). While the

two merit review criteria remain unchanged (Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts), guidance has been provided to clarify and improve the function of the criteria. Changes will affect the project summary and project description sections of proposals. Annual and final reports also will be affected.

Graduate Student Leaders Sought to Shape Science Policy

Applications are now being accepted for the 2014 AIBS Emerging Public Policy Leadership Award. This award recognizes graduate students in the biological sciences who have demonstrated initiative and leadership in science policy. Recipients receive first-hand experience at the interface of science and public policy.

Winners receive:

- A trip to Washington, DC, to participate in the Biological and Ecological Sciences Coalition Congressional Visits Day, an annual event that brings scientists to the nation's capital to advocate for federal investment in the biological sciences, with a primary focus on the National Science Foundation. The event will be held on 9-10 April 2014. Domestic travel and hotel expenses will be paid for the winners.
- Policy and communications training, and information on trends in federal science funding and the legislative process.
- Meetings with Congressional policymakers to discuss the importance of federal investments in the biological sciences.
- A 1-year AIBS membership, including a subscription to the journal *BioScience* and a copy of "Communicating Science: A Primer for Working with the Media."
- An award certificate and membership in the EPPLA alumni network.

The 2014 award is open to U.S. citizens enrolled in a graduate degree program in the biological sciences, science education, or a closely allied field. Applicants should have a demonstrated interest in and commitment to science policy and/or science education policy. Prior EPPLA winners and AIBS science policy interns/fellows are not eligible.

Applications are due by 11:59 PM Eastern Time on Monday, 13 January 2014. The application can be downloaded at <http://www.aibs.org/public-policy/eppla.html>.

Job Announcement: Program Officer for Advances in Digitization of Biological Collections

The Directorate for Biological Sciences at the National Science Foundation is advertising for a program officer position to manage the program Advances in Digitization of Biological Collections (ADBC). For information about the scope of the program, visit the program web site at http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=503559&org=EF&from=home.

The ADBC program began in 2010 as a result of the community strategic plan for a National Integrated Biocollections Alliance (NIBA). The program supports some of the NIBA goals, specifically increasing access to the wealth of information contained in vouchered biological

specimens and associated metadata through digitization and providing a central resource for access to the data (iDigBio). For information about the NIBA strategic plan and implementation plan, see http://www.aibs.org/public-policy/news/scientists_call_for_greater_access_to_biodiversity_resources_data.html where the links to community efforts are provided. For information about the goals and activities of iDigBio, see www.iDigBio.org.

The position for Program Officer for the ADBC program is being advertised as both a permanent position and as a temporary position. If you wish to apply to the permanent position, the application and information can be found at USAJobs:

<https://www.usajobs.gov/GetJob/ViewDetails/355394500?org=NSF>. If you wish to apply for the temporary position, the application can be found at USAJobs:

<https://www.usajobs.gov/GetJob/ViewDetails/355388100?org=NSF>. If you are interested in both positions then you must apply to both job solicitations.

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.