

NSC Alliance Washington Report, Volume 5, Issue 7, July 17, 2014

In this Issue:

- House Interior Appropriations Bill is a Mixed Bag for Collections
 - Safety a Concern After High Visibility Mistakes at Government Labs
 - Deadline Approaching for Collections Proposals
 - BBC Coverage of Collections Conference
 - \$2 Million in Museum Grants Announced
 - E.O. Wilson's "Life on Earth" iBooks Textbook and iTunes U Course
 - Subscribe to the NSCA Washington Report
-

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. With proper attribution to NSC Alliance, all material from these reports may be reproduced or forwarded. We encourage you to share this report with colleagues at your institution.

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.

House Interior Appropriations Bill is a Mixed Bag for Collections

The House Appropriations Committee has approved legislation to fund the Department of the Interior, Environmental Protection Agency, Forest Service, and Smithsonian Institution in fiscal year 2015. The new fiscal year begins on 1 October 2014.

A major collections care initiative proposed by the Department of the Interior (DOI) does not appear to be included in the bill. For the third year, DOI proposed a plan to address major deficiencies in the care of cultural and scientific specimens. The President's budget request included an additional \$2 million to reduce the collections' accessioning and cataloging backlog; identify and assess collections housed at non-federal locations; correct identified deficiencies in accountability, preservation, and protection of Interior cultural and scientific collections; and pursue opportunities for consolidation of bureau and non-bureau facilities housing collections.

Due to budget constraints, the Department has been unable to implement a multi-year action plan to address recommendations made by the DOI Inspector General regarding Interior's accountability for its collections. In a December 2009 report, the Inspector General found that DOI has failed to properly accession, catalogue, or inventory museum collections, leaving artifacts "unavailable for research, education, or display and ... subject to theft, deterioration, and damage."

The Smithsonian Institution, which is mostly supported by the federal government, would receive an \$8 million increase. This is far lower than the \$46 million increase it had sought from Congress, with most of the difference coming from the facilities budget. Increased funding is included for improving the stewardship of national collections. An additional \$10 million for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education was not funded.

Safety a Concern After High Visibility Mistakes at Government Labs

Several recent incidents involving collections of dangerous pathogens have put safety protocols at government labs at the center of the public's attention.

Recently, 300 vials containing materials infected with infectious diseases were discovered in a storage room at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The vials, which had been there for decades, included six vials containing smallpox. The other vials contained dengue, influenza, and other viruses.

In June, anthrax samples thought to be inactive were moved from highly secure labs to less secure ones at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta.

The Food and Drug Administration has called for a complete inventory of its cold storage facilities. The cold storage facility at NIH where the smallpox vials were found has been operated by FDA since 1972.

Tests by the CDC found some of the smallpox virus to still be alive, despite dating from 1946 to 1964.

Deadline Approaching for Collections Proposals

Proposals for the Collections in Support of Biological Research Program are due to the National Science Foundation by 11 August 2014. The program funds improvements to secure, improve, and organize collections and collections-related data, or to transfer collection ownership responsibilities. More information is available at

http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=503651&org=DBI&from=home.

BBC Coverage of Collections Conference

The importance of natural history collections was the focus of a recent BBC Radio Wales story. The radio story reported on the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections conference held in Cardiff, Wales. The theme of the conference was "Historic Collections: A Resource for the Future." To listen to the story, visit <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0486gjl>.

\$2 Million in Museum Grants Announced

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) announced the award of \$2.4 million for 37 grants for museums. The awards were made for three programs: Sparks! Ignition Grants for Museums, Native American/Native Hawaiian Museum Services, and Museum Grants for African American History and Culture.

“These grant projects have immense potential to serve local communities and the nation in advancing education and preserving cultural heritage,” said IMLS Director Susan H. Hildreth. “Programs that are being funded will strengthen museum services through professional training, improved care of collections, and the testing of creative solutions to challenging problems. We are delighted to announce these awards, and we are eager to see the visions for these unique opportunities and experiences brought to life.”

Among the recipients of Sparks! Ignition Grants for Museums was the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, which received a grant to develop and test changes to galleries that aim to increase scientific observation skills of museum guests.

E.O. Wilson’s “Life on Earth” iBooks Textbook and iTunes U Course

A new iBooks Textbook and iTunes U course based on Encyclopedia of Life (EOL) content are available for high school biology students. E. O. Wilson’s “Life on Earth” was created by the E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation. The electronic book is available for free on the iBooks Store and is accompanied by an iTunes U course called “Biology: Life on Earth.” The iTunes U course brings together content from the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, National Geographic, the Encyclopedia of Life, and other institutions with content emphasizing important themes like citizen science, evolution, climate change, and the protection of biodiversity.

EOL content and resource are available in the first section of the course, “Unity and Diversity of Life on Earth.” Activities include creating virtual collections of species and accessing the biodiversity resources available through EOL’s iTunes U collections.

The iBook and course are available at iTunes.com/lifeonearth.

Subscribe to the NSCA Washington Report

Get the latest news and policy updates of interest to the scientific collections community by subscribing to the NSC Alliance Washington Report. Subscription to the newsletter is free. Please consider sharing this opportunity with others at your institution. Subscribe at <http://nscalliance.org/>.

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.

The NSC Alliance Washington Report is a publication of the NSC Alliance. For information about membership in the NSC Alliance, please contact spotter@aibs.org.