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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. 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. Anyone interested in receiving copies of the NSC Alliance Washington Report may subscribe at www.NSCAlliance.org -- it's free!**

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 Could Wrap Up Spending Bills During Lame Duck

Now that the elections are over, congressional leaders of both parties seem keen to finalize federal spending for fiscal year (FY) 2015 before January, when the new Congress will be sworn in.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) and Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) have both indicated their support for finalizing the 12 bills that collectively fund the federal government. According to aides for Reid and Mikulski, there is no talk of moving another short-term Continuing Resolution that would flat fund the government at current spending levels. Instead, these aids say that a comprehensive deal is expected during the lame duck session to determine funding for the remainder of FY 2015.

House Appropriations Chairman Harold Rogers (R-KY) voiced a similar position a few days before the election. "We need to do an omnibus bill funding the entire government for the rest of the year, and get that whole business behind us, so that come January, [Senator McConnell] will have a clean slate rather than looking backwards to old fights that we could look forward to making positive changes."

Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY), the likely new Senate Majority Leader in the next session of Congress, has signaled his desire to get a fresh start in January, rather than dragging out policy fights that could be settled in the coming weeks.

A potential problem, however is that some Republican lawmakers may try to delay action on appropriations until their party is in the majority in a few months. Senator Ted Cruz and other conservatives have already tried to stall spending decisions from being made during the lame duck session.

Despite the new fiscal year beginning on 1 October, no appropriations bills have been enacted. Congress reached a deal in September to fund agencies at FY 2014 spending levels through 11 December 2014.

Scientists Meet with State and Federal Lawmakers

Dozens of biological researchers and educators met with their lawmakers as part of the 6th Annual Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits event. This national initiative, organized by the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS), encourages scientists across the nation to showcase for federal and state lawmakers the people, facilities, and equipment required to conduct scientific research. The NSC Alliance was a sponsor of the event.

“Research underpins innovations that touch the lives of Americans every day, from advances in food safety and security to better environmental management to improvements in human health,” said Dr. Richard O’Grady, AIBS Executive Director. “Scientists demonstrate these payoffs when they meet with their members of Congress or state legislators to discuss their research.”

This nationwide event enables scientists to meet with their elected officials in their local area rather than in Washington, DC or the state capital, and allows lawmakers to learn first-hand about the science and research facilities in their district. Meetings took place in cities and states across the country.

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. Participants ranged from graduate students to senior researchers and educators.

“The visit was about information sharing,” explained Frank Kuserk, professor of biological sciences and director of the environmental studies and sciences program at Moravian College in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. “We wanted an opportunity to show [Congressman Charlie Dent (R-PA)] the many good things that we doing here at Moravian. Our students were nervous, but they did a terrific job of sharing their enthusiasm, answering his questions and interacting with him.”

In addition to NSC Alliance, the event was sponsored by the Botanical Society of America, Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology, Organization of Biological Field Stations, Society for the Study of Evolution, and Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology.

Individuals in the 2014 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.

Highlights of the event include:

- U.S. Representative Charlie Dent (R-PA) visited the campus of Moravian College and met with undergraduate students and faculty members involved in a research mentoring program;
- The Cheadle Center for Biodiversity and Ecological Restoration at the University California, Santa Barbara hosted U.S. Representative Lois Capps (D-CA);
- U.S. Representative Dan Benishek (R-MI) toured the University of Michigan Biological Station;
- Tours of research facilities were arranged for two California state senators;
- Faculty members at Texas Tech University and the University of Central Missouri met with their Representatives at local district offices;
- Congressional staff toured the Otis L. Floyd Nursery Research Center at Tennessee State University, a new research facility at Harvard Medical School, and a natural history collection at Southeastern Louisiana University; and
- Numerous other meetings were held with state elected officials and the staff of federal and state lawmakers.

More information about the Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits event is available at www.aibs.org/public-policy/congressional_district_visits.html.

Deadline Approaching for Comments on National Big Data R&D Initiative

Information is sought from big data stakeholders about new big data programs and priorities across the federal government. The federal advisory group responsible for coordinating and planning big data initiatives is seeking input on the draft “National Big Data R&D Initiative: Vision and Areas of Interest.” The draft plan is an overarching framework to support national-scale big data science and engineering research and education. It will not focus on individual agency plans.

The deadline to comment is 14 November 2014. Learn more at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-10-02/html/2014-23444.htm>.

Comments Sought on NSF’s Advanced Computing Activities

The National Research Council of the National Academies is currently developing a framework to guide future National Science Foundation (NSF) investments in advanced computing for scientific and engineering research. The study committee is seeking input from the scientific community on their vision for the future of NSF advanced computing in order to inform their

recommendations to NSF.

For more on the study, to view the NRC's interim report, and to submit comments, visit nas.edu/ScienceComputing. Comments should be submitted by 31 January 2015.

Upcoming Webinars on Small Natural History Collections

The Small Collections Network and iDigBio have announced the dates for future webinars in their series focused on management of small natural history collections. The webinars are free to attend and registration is not required.

“Small Fish in a Big Pond: Lessons Learned in Digitizing a Small Paleontology Collection”

13 November 2014, 3-4 p.m. EST

<http://scnet.acis.ufl.edu/content/small-fish-big-pond-lessons-learned-digitizing-small-paleontology-collection>

“The Value of the Symbiota Portal and Database for Small Collections”

15 December 2014, 2-3 p.m. EST

<http://scnet.acis.ufl.edu/content/value-symbiota-portal-and-database-small-collections>

“Increasing Capacity for Small Natural History Collections: Developing Protocol for Volunteer-Based Inventorying Programs”

15 January 2015, 3-4 p.m. EST

<http://scnet.acis.ufl.edu/content/increasing-capacity-small-natural-history-collections-developing-protocol-volunteer-based>

“Saving Orphaned Collections”

19 February 2015, 3-4 p.m. EST

<http://scnet.acis.ufl.edu/content/saving-orphaned-collections>

Complete the Heritage Health Information 2014 Survey

A national survey has launched to assess the state of the nation's collections held by museums, scientific research collections, archaeological repositories, archives, and libraries. The results of the survey will be used to recommend next steps in collections preservation.

The Natural Science Collections Alliance is serving as an allied partner in the effort.

If your organization is one of the roughly 14,000 institutions asked to participate, please complete the survey. Details about accessing the survey have been emailed to institution directors.

Reminder: NSC Alliance Board Elections Underway

The NSC Alliance is currently holding elections for its Board of Directors. Last week, each NSC Alliance member institution received an email containing instructions about how to cast a vote. For more information, contact Robert Gropp at rgropp@aibs.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.