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ESA IN DC

**ESA Signs Community Letter Noting Concerns with Secret Science Reform Act**

On July 31, ESA, along with over 40 additional organizations, signed on to a community letter led by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) expressing concerns with the Secret Science Reform Act of 2014. As previously reported in the August ESA Science Policy News, this legislation aims “to prohibit the Environmental Protection Agency from proposing, finalizing, or disseminating regulations or assessments based upon science that is not transparent or reproducible” and has been introduced in both the House and Senate. In the House, the legislation was approved by the Science, Space, and Technology Committee in June. In the Senate, the bill was introduced to the Environment & Public Works Committee, where it has not yet been considered.

The community worries that the bill would unintentionally exclude certain important research projects that are difficult to reproduce. Specifically, “research that involved physical specimens or biological materials that are not easily accessible;” “longitudinal studies that are so large and of great duration that they could not realistically be reproduced;” or “scientific data from a one-time event (e.g.,
Deepwater Horizon Gulf oil spill) where the data are being gathered in real time” are cited as examples of work that would be jeopardized by the language of the bill.

The letter also expresses caution that the legislation interferes with the Office of Science and Technology Policy’s (OSTP) efforts to establish federal agency data policies, as required in the “America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2010.” The letter encourages Congress to “wait to review the agency policies before imposing new statutory requirements.”

**Sources and Additional Information:**


**National Research Council Launches Study on GE Crops; ESA Member Named Committee Chair**

The National Academy of Sciences’ National Research Council (NRC) announced a new two-year study on genetically engineered (GE) crops with a completion date in early 2016. Dr. Fred Gould, an ESA fellow, is serving as the Committee Chair. Dr. Gould is a William Neal Reynolds Distinguished Professor of Entomology and codirector of the Center on Genetic Engineering and Society of North Carolina State University; he currently serves on the National Research Council’s Board on Agriculture and Natural Resources and the NAS Nominating Committee. The Committee has announced dates of its planned activities for the remainder of the year, with the first public meeting scheduled for September 15-16 in Washington, DC.

**Sources and Additional Information:**

- More information on the study, Dr. Gould, and upcoming meetings and webinars, is available at [http://nas-sites.org/ge-crops/](http://nas-sites.org/ge-crops/).

**CONGRESSIONAL UPDATES AND NEWS**

**Continuing Resolution Expected in September; Final Appropriations Hinge on Elections**

Congress left for the month-long August recess without passing a single fiscal year (FY) 2015 appropriations bill. When they return on September 8, there will be a limited number of days to reach agreement on a continuing resolution (CR) to fund the federal government in the new fiscal year, which begins October 1. While neither the House nor Senate anticipates a government shutdown, consideration of the CR is likely to be complicated by the significant divide between the House and Senate over the President’s request for emergency supplemental appropriations to address the immigration crisis at the Southern border.
Congress is likely to consider a short-term CR that funds programs at current FY 2014 levels. While the top-line funding allocations may be at the FY 2014 level, federal agencies have some discretion for how they administer a CR. Some agencies may allocate funding at about 90 percent of the usual rate. Although for a short period of time, with the uncertainty surrounding the upcoming elections and particularly the outcome of the Senate races, federal agencies are likely to be restrictive in allocating funding until Congress decides how to complete the FY 2015 appropriations process.

A final appropriations endgame will depend on the political climate resulting from the mid-term elections. While many theories exist as to what various election outcomes could mean for legislating, a “status quo” result where Republicans hold the House and Democrats maintain their Senate majority is the scenario most likely to allow for an omnibus appropriations bill that would provide funding for most federal programs. The outlook for finalizing a FY 2015 budget becomes more uncertain if Republicans net the six seats necessary to take control of the Senate.

**America COMPETES Act Introduced in Senate**

On July 31, a group of Democratic Senators led by Senator Jay Rockefeller (D-WV) introduced the America Creating Opportunities to Meaningfully Promote Excellence in Technology, Education, and Science (COMPETES) Reauthorization Act of 2014 (S. 2757), which would authorize National Science Foundation (NSF) funding for fiscal years (FY) 2015 through FY 2019, increasing overall authorization levels by 6.6 or 6.7 percent each year, and Research and Related Activities funding by 7.2 percent each year. These authorized levels would not translate into actual funding for NSF unless appropriators allocate the funding to the agency through each year’s appropriations bills.

The bill also includes language in support of the NSF review process, commercialization grants, and NSF-supported basic science, including in the areas of social, behavioral, and economic sciences.

In a press release announcing the bill’s introduction, Senator Rockefeller, who has been a vocal champion for U.S. investment in federal research, cited the importance of science and engineering research to ensuring innovation and global competitiveness.

In addition, the legislation would direct the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) to convene a subcommittee to propose recommendations for reducing the costs and administrative burdens associated with federal research grants. Also included is a provision requesting that OSTP coordinate policy across science agencies for helping career-life balance, workplace flexibility, and family-responsive initiatives, as well as language emphasizing the importance of federal agency participation in science and technology conferences.

The Senate bill may be brought up for committee consideration following the August recess, but the likelihood that a COMPETES bill will clear Congress remains uncertain as the House is unlikely to agree to the funding authorization levels proposed in the Senate bill. The House recently postponed efforts to approve its comprehensive NSF reauthorization bill – the Frontiers in Innovative Research, Science, and Technology (FIRST) Act – and passed a number of minor science-related bills.

**Sources and Additional Information:**
Lawmakers Circulate Letter Urging EPA to Restrict Neonicotinoid Use

In an effort to build on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) recent phase-out of neonicotinoid insecticides in all National Wildlife Refuges by 2016, Congressmen Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) and John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) circulated among House members a letter to be sent to EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy urging her to take further action to protect pollinators. The letter outlines several policy recommendations to EPA, including: restricting/suspending the use of neonicotinoids on bee attractive crops; evaluation of pesticides; compliance with Endangered Species Act Section 7 prior to registering pesticides; ensuring pesticide labels are up to date and include bee hazard statements; assessment of pesticides for impacts on pollinators; phase out conditional registrations; rectify discrepancies between garden versus agricultural products; and re-categorize commercial neonicotinoid as restricted use.

Sources and Additional Information:


Senate Appropriations Committee Approves FY 2015 Defense Bill

Prior to leaving for the summer recess, the full Senate Appropriations Committee (SAC) unanimously approved its fiscal year (FY) 2015 defense appropriations bill on July 17. The bill totals $542.8 billion, which includes $59.7 billion in Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funding for the war in Afghanistan. During the markup, Defense Subcommittee Chairman Richard Durbin (D-IL) highlighted the importance of innovation, basic research, and medical research as key priorities for the bill. Of interest to ESA members, infectious disease research is identified by the Committee as among its top biomedical/health priorities.

The prioritization of basic research is evident in the bill and explanatory report. The Committee would provide $2.27 billion for basic research (6.1), 5 percent above the FY 2014 level and over 12 percent above both the President’s budget request and the House Appropriations Committee recommendation. The report notes frustration with the 7 percent cut proposed to basic research in the President’s request and highlights the importance of basic research to maintain America’s technological edge, grow future scientists, and create new business opportunities. The basic research increase would be applied to all of the service branches, as well as defense-wide accounts. The report notes that
DARPA basic research would receive an increase of $30.91 million, 8.5 percent above the FY 2014 level. The Committee urges DARPA to engage a wider set of colleges and universities in its research.

Under the Senate proposal, applied research (6.2) and advanced technology development (6.3) programs would face a 1 percent and 0.6 percent cut, respectively, from their FY 2014 enacted levels. Overall, the Committee would increase Science and Technology (S&T) accounts (6.1 through 6.3) by 4.6 percent over the President’s request at the expense of non-S&T accounts within the research, development, test, and evaluation (RDTE) umbrella.

The Appropriations Committee’s report contains numerous items affecting the research community, and more specifically ESA and its members. The introduction to the report, which focuses on high-profile items of greatest concern to the Committee, notes that funding would be provided above the President’s request for, “basic research, medical research, alternative energy, advanced metals and materials, military burn treatment, and traumatic brain injury and psychological health.” Within the report, the Committee demonstrates unease about challenges related to infectious diseases and global health. In a section of the report titled “Medical Defense Against Infectious Disease,” the Committee highlights the importance of medical countermeasures against malaria, dengue, and chikungunya and expresses concern with recent DOD efforts to reduce funding for infectious disease research. The Committee notes that infectious diseases pose an ongoing threat to American servicemembers stationed outside the U.S. and calls on DOD to continue investment in research and development of both strategies to combat infectious diseases and to develop medical countermeasures.

The Committee also addresses infectious disease in its remarks about broader DOD global health activities. In this section, the Committee reiterates the challenges presented by infectious and neglected diseases and urges DOD to fully fund research and development in these areas across Army, Navy, and defense-wide programs. As part of this effort, the Committee directs all DOD programs currently involved in infectious disease research to provide a report to the congressional defense committees “outlining funding and accomplishments from fiscal years 2011 through 2014.” The report is likely aimed at increasing efficiency and eliminating duplication among programs supporting infectious disease research while still maintaining robust overall funding.

As reported in the June ESA Science Policy News, Chairman Durbin remains committed to medical research programs through DOD, in part to offset funding constraints at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). While the Congressionally Directed Medical Research and Development Program (CDMRP) had been considered a target for cuts in recent years, the FY 2015 Senate bill proposes robust funding for biomedical research across a number of areas. Overall, the bill would add $781 million above the President’s budget request for medical research and development, which is $190 million more than the House would provide. The Committee encourages DOD to improve its coordination with NIH and to continue efforts to eliminate duplication among the agencies.

Despite the normally bipartisan nature of the defense appropriations bill, the outlook for passage of a final measure for FY 2015 is uncertain due to partisan disagreements over the overall process for consideration of appropriations bills by the full Senate.
FEDERAL AGENCY AND ADMINISTRATION UPDATES AND NEWS

Entomologists Send Letter to Agriculture Secretary Urging Conehead Termite Eradication

On August 11, a group of 26 entomologists sent a letter to Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack in support of efforts to eradicate the invasive conehead termite from the United States, as described in an amendment to the House fiscal year (FY) 2015 Agriculture Appropriations Act. During consideration of the agriculture appropriations legislation, an amendment offered by Representative Ander Crenshaw (R-FL) “directs the United States Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service to provide technical assistance with already appropriated funds to develop, implement, and administer an effective conehead termite eradication program.”

As the letter states, “conehead termites have a high reproductive capacity and expansive tastes, eagerly consuming dead wood from live trees (including citrus), shrubs, roots, structures, and furniture as well as cardboard and other cellulose-containing products.” They pose a significant risk to crops, trees, and other structures. Conehead termites are an invasive species that is currently present in a small area in Florida (less than ½ square mile).

Conehead termites are unique in that they build visible nests and tunnels above ground, which make them especially vulnerable to eradication efforts. The group letter signed by entomology researchers encourages the use of intensive actions now to prevent the spread of this pest.

Sources and Additional Information:


White House Releases FY 2016 Budget Priorities for Science and Technology

On July 18, the White House released its science and technology budget priorities for fiscal year (FY) 2016 via a memo issued jointly from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP). Despite the fact that Congress has yet to finalize FY 2015 appropriations, the FY 2016 priorities are intended to help agencies structure FY 2016 budget requests which are due for release in February 2015.

Many of the priorities listed are the same as those in memos from previous years of the Administration. These include advanced manufacturing, clean energy, global climate change, information technology, informed policy-making incorporating findings from R&D, national security issues, and sustained
investments in life sciences and neuroscience. Among the few new priorities are efforts to combat antibiotic-resistant bacteria and the need to counter biological threats. These memos serve primarily as guidelines and thus do not guarantee investments in these areas.

Also notable are the omission of issues seen in previous memos. This year, there was no specific section devoted to innovation and commercialization, nor mention of the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program. Instead, there is a suggestion that, as appropriate, agencies include traditional “technology-push” incentives, such as grants, with a consideration of additional means to encourage “market-pull.”

Sources and Additional Information:


**NSF Releases Solicitation for Science and Technology Centers (STC) Competition**

The National Science Foundation (NSF) has released the highly anticipated solicitation for the next round of Science and Technology Centers (STC). STCs support complex research and education projects that require large-scale and long-term awards. While this STC competition is open to any area of research NSF supports, the solicitation states that, “Themes consistent with NSF priorities, including such areas as cognitive science and neuroscience, clean energy, and food security, as well as other national priorities are encouraged.” While the STC program is NSF-wide, oversight for each STC is the responsibility of the appropriate research directorate in coordination with NSF’s Office of International and Integrative Activities.

As in past STC competitions, education activities will be an important component, with proposed Centers encouraged to focus efforts on specific programs that are appropriately integrated into the research activities of the Center. STCs are further encouraged, but not required, to form collaborations with institutions that serve underrepresented students interested in STEM.

Pending funding availability, NSF intends to award $16 million in fiscal year (FY) 2016 for up to four new STCs and $20 million per year for the remaining four years, with the possibility of a five-year renewal.

Sources and Additional Information:

Multiagency Funding Opportunity Announcement on Ecology and Evolution of Infectious Diseases Released

The National Science Foundation (NSF), National Institutes of Health (NIH), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), U.K. Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, and the United States-Israel Binational Science Foundation recently released the solicitation for the fiscal year (FY) 2014 competition of their joint “Ecology and Evolution of Infectious Diseases” program. The program supports research on, “the ecological, evolutionary, and socio-ecological principles and processes that influence the transmission dynamics of infectious diseases,” including vector-borne diseases.

The solicitation highly encourages the development of multidisciplinary teams for this program, and entomology is specifically included among the lists of disciplines that can contribute to the understanding and ability to control and predict infectious diseases. Proposals are due November 19; please see the program solicitation for specific details regarding this opportunity.

Sources and Additional Information:


New DARPA Challenge Seeks Methods for Forecasting Chikungunya Spread

The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), which is a research branch of the Department of Defense, recently released a new DARPA Challenge to seek methods for predicting the spread of chikungunya virus in the Western Hemisphere. Awards ranging from $10,000 to $100,000 will be granted to the top submissions. DARPA has an interest in developing infectious disease forecasting capabilities to mitigate outbreaks that may pose threats to U.S. military worldwide.

Chikungunya, which is transmitted to humans by mosquitoes and has been present in Africa and Asia for decades, is attracting increasing attention since it was detected in the Caribbean at the end of last year. As reported in the August ESA Science Policy News, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced the first locally acquired case in the U.S. in July.

Sources and Additional Information: