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ESA IN DC

ESA Position Statements on Pollinator Health and Tick-borne Diseases

Last month, ESA released a position statement on tick-borne diseases (July 29, 2015) and another on pollinator health (July 24, 2015). Both position statements are available at [http://www.entsoc.org/resources/position_papers](http://www.entsoc.org/resources/position_papers).
Congressman Pierluisi Highlights ESA Capitol Hill Briefing in Press Release

On June 25, Congressman Pedro Pierluisi (D-PR) highlighted ESA’s recent Capitol Hill briefing in a press release conveying the importance of federal support for combating chikungunya. As previously reported in the June ESA Policy Newsletter, on May 6, ESA teamed up with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA), and the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE) to host a Hill briefing sponsored by Congressman Pierluisi titled “Chikungunya? Combating the Spread of Mosquito-Borne Diseases in America.” The mention of ESA’s briefing in the press release is evidence of ESA’s heightened profile on Capitol Hill and demonstrates the importance of discussing entomology-related issues with Members of Congress and their staff.

Sources and Additional Information:


Scientific Community Launches Conference Travel Grassroots Campaign; ESA Signs Letter Opposing Conference Travel Restrictions

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) recently launched a campaign to elicit anecdotes highlighting the important role of conferences and meetings in the science, technology, engineering, math, and public health research communities. The campaign is in response to consistent comments from offices on Capitol Hill and agencies that those making the decisions often do not understand the value of scientific conferences, and how they are different from other types of meetings. This campaign is an effort to collect stories and information necessary to tell policymakers about conferences involving their constituents or in their district or state.

The campaign launched along with a Lead Letter to the Editor in Science magazine. The Lead Letter links to another letter sent to Senate Appropriators in April that was signed by 126 organizations, including ESA.

Meanwhile, on Capitol Hill, ESA and other science societies delivered a letter to Senators Brian Schatz (D-HI) and Chris Coons (D-DE) in opposition to conference travel restrictions in existing appropriations legislation. This spurred both Senators to introduce an amendment in the full committee markup of the fiscal year (FY) 2016 Financial Services and General Government appropriations bill. The amendment would have inserted language allowing the Obama Administration to modify its existing policies and reduce the harmful impacts felt especially by scientific conferences.

While there were not enough Senators in favor of the amendment to a vote, Senators on the Committee engaged in a positive and bipartisan discussion and expressed an interest in working together to find a solution. ESA continues to work with Senators Schatz, Coons, and other offices so that the desired language is included in any final spending bill.

Sources and Additional Information:
Consortium Updates and News

Appropriations Update: House and Senate Appropriations Committees Approve Versions of FY 2016 Agriculture Appropriations Bills

This month, both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees marked up and approved their respective versions of the fiscal year (FY) 2016 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

The House Appropriations Committee approved their version of the bill on July 8. The House bill totals $20.7 billion in discretionary spending, which represents a decrease of $175 million from the current enacted level. The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) would receive $1.284 billion, which is $5 million below the FY 2015 enacted level. Within NIFA, the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) would receive $335 million, an increase of $10 million (3 percent) above the FY 2015 enacted level. Although this falls far short of the President’s requested $450 million, given that the total allocation of the bill is down from last year, a 3 percent increase signals the Committee’s support for this program. For the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), the bill would provide $1.167 billion. Within the ARS appropriation, $1.122 billion would be allocated to the salaries and expenses budget line, and $45 million would be allocated to the buildings and facilities budget line. Both budget lines fall short of the President’s request, but the buildings and facilities account would maintain the FY 2015 enacted level and the salaries and expenses account would face a reduction.

The report accompanying the House bill also includes language praising USDA’s efforts related to pollinators and colony health research, stating that the Committee recognizes that Colony Collapse Disorder and other issues are of concern to a number of stakeholders, including researchers. In addition, the report includes language on invasive species to encourage ARS and NIFA to support the research, education, and conservation of native plants.

The Senate Appropriations Committee approved their version of the bill on July 16. The Senate version includes a total of $20.5 billion in discretionary spending, slightly lower than the House bill. NIFA would be funded at $1.294 billion, which is $4.2 million (<1 percent) above the FY 2015 enacted level, and AFRI would receive $325 million, flat funding consistent with FY 2015 levels. For ARS, the Senate bill would provide $1.137 billion, a decrease of $40 million (3.5 percent) from the FY 2015 enacted level. Unlike the House bill, the entire allocation would be for the salaries and expenses budget line, with no money appropriated for the buildings and facilities budget line. Considering the President’s requested amount of $205 million and the FY 2015 enacted level of $45 million for the buildings and facilities budget, zeroing out the account would be a significant cut.
The report accompanying the Senate bill also includes language on pollinator health, praising the Administration’s recently released Pollinator Research Action Plan and other interagency efforts, and encouraging additional efforts to protect monarch butterflies.

Neither the House nor Senate bill would fund the Administration’s two proposed Innovation Institutes, requested at $40 million each. This is the second year the Institutes have failed to garner significant support within the Committee. The Senate report also highlights invasive annual grasses and invasive tree pests as critical challenges.

As previously reported in the July ESA Science Policy Newsletter, the fate of appropriations bills for FY 2016 remains uncertain. Democrats and Republicans remain divided on adherence to the budgetary caps established in the Budget Control Act of 2011. Until a budget agreement or alternative plan is reached, it is unclear how the programs in a final version of the FY 2016 Agriculture appropriations bill will fare.

Sources and Additional Information:


Legislators Introduce Saving America’s Pollinators Act, Hold Capitol Hill Briefing Highlighting Bill

On July 8, Representatives Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) and John Conyers (D-MI) organized a briefing titled “Saving America’s Pollinators.” Both Congressmen noted in their opening remarks that scientists do not yet know the long-term effects of neonicotinoid insecticides, and thus, encouraged suspending the use of neonicotinoid seed treatments until further research has been conducted and reviewed.

The briefing included three participants. Maggie Douglas, a Ph.D. candidate at Pennsylvania State University, spoke about Integrated Pest Management (IPM) as an alternative to indiscriminate insecticide use and offered suggestions for encouraging IPM. Brett Hartl, a representative from the Center for Biological Diversity, focused his remarks on efforts to enlist the monarch butterfly on the endangered species list following their rapid population decline over the past 20 years; an ingredient found in herbicides may further threaten the monarch’s health and population. Finally, Doug Gurian-Sherman, a representative from the Center for Food Safety discussed how neonicotinoids could be contributing to the decline in pollinator populations and highlighted a lack of data being collected by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to examine the impact of neonicotinoids on the environment.
Congressmen Blumenauer and Conyers used the briefing as an opportunity to highlight their proposed legislation, the *Saving America’s Pollinators Act of 2015*, which was introduced on March 4 and currently has 42 cosponsors. Previously introduced in the 113th Congress, the bill would charge EPA with suspending the use of neonicotinoids until they are proven safe to pollinators through a full review of scientific evidence or through a field study. The legislation also directs the Department of the Interior to work with EPA to monitor pollinator health and populations.

**Sources and Additional Information:**


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**Senate Committee Seeking Input on America COMPETES Legislation**

On July 8, the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee issued a press release announcing it is seeking input from the scientific research community as it begins to move forward on its version of the American COMPETES reauthorization bill. The effort to solicit comments from stakeholders is being led by Senators Cory Gardner (R-CO) and Gary Peters (D-MI), who intend to use the input to help inform upcoming meetings and briefings examining topics such as basic research; science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education; and commercialization. Those interested in providing input should email comments to the Committee no later than August 21, 2015.

The House passed its version of the COMPETES bill, which authorizes funding for the National Science Foundation and other science agencies, in May. However, provisions in the House version were met with opposition from the scientific community. In the Senate, the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee Chair John Thune (R-SD) and Ranking Member Bill Nelson (D-FL) have both voiced a desire to work in a bipartisan way to craft the Senate version of the COMPETES bill.

**Sources and Additional Information:**

- A press release from the committee with additional details can be found at [http://www.commerce.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?p=PressReleases&ContentRecord_id=63280708-209f-4b5e-bdaa-ddd4c5fbb63e&ContentType_id=77eb43da-aa94-497d-a73f-5c951ff72372&Group_id=505cc3fa-a767-40f4-8ac2-4b8326b44e94](http://www.commerce.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?p=PressReleases&ContentRecord_id=63280708-209f-4b5e-bdaa-ddd4c5fbb63e&ContentType_id=77eb43da-aa94-497d-a73f-5c951ff72372&Group_id=505cc3fa-a767-40f4-8ac2-4b8326b44e94).
- Comments and input to the Committee can be emailed to [mailto:SciencePolicy@commerce.senate.gov](mailto:SciencePolicy@commerce.senate.gov).

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**Senate Committee Approves Public Access Legislation**

On July 29, the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee passed the *Fair Access to Science and Technology Research Act of 2015* (S. 779), also known as the *FASTR Act*. The legislation would require research agencies to have open access plans with a one-year embargo before posting free versions of published papers. This is in line with the one-year embargo that is current policy at the National Institutes of Health, the Obama Administration’s 2013 memorandum on public access, and the recently released policies from the National Science Foundation and other agencies.

**Sources and Additional Information:**

- Comments and input to the Committee can be emailed to [mailto:SciencePolicy@commerce.senate.gov](mailto:SciencePolicy@commerce.senate.gov).
FASTR and its previous iteration, the Federal Research Public Access Act (FRPAA) have been introduced in almost every Congress since 2006, but has never before been brought up for a committee vote. There is a House version of the legislation (H.R. 1477), but it is unclear when that bill will be considered in committee.

Sources and additional information:


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**House Passes Safe and Accurate Food Labeling Act**

On July 23, the House of Representatives passed the Safe and Accurate Food Labeling Act of 2015 (H.R. 1599) by a vote of 275 to 150, with support from 230 Republicans and 45 Democrats. In general, the bill would establish a federal standard effectively overruling any state-passed laws mandating the labeling of genetically engineered foods. Among the provisions included in the bill is the authority for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to establish a definition for the word “natural” in food labeling and the creation of a voluntary genetically engineered food certification program.

House passage of the bill followed approval by the House Agriculture Committee on July 14. There is currently no Senate version of the bill.

Sources and Additional Information:

- The full text of the bill is available at [https://www.congress.gov/114/bills/hr1599/BILLS-114hr1599fs.pdf](https://www.congress.gov/114/bills/hr1599/BILLS-114hr1599fs.pdf).
- An archived webcast of the House Agriculture Committee consideration of the bill is available at [http://www.ustream.tv/channel/hclive18](http://www.ustream.tv/channel/hclive18).

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**House Passes 21st Century Cures Act**

On July 10, the House of Representatives passed the 21st Century Cures Act (H.R.6) by a vote of 344 to 77. The legislation would provide funding increases for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), including $8.75 billion in mandatory funding over five years as part of the NIH Innovation Fund. In addition to the additional mandatory funding, the bill would increase NIH’s appropriations authorization by $1.5 billion each year for the next three years. The bill also includes sections on Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases; the legislation would direct the establishment of a permanent interagency working group and the development of a Strategic Plan to address these diseases.
The bill’s final passage marks more than a year of effort by House Energy and Commerce Chairman Fred Upton (R-MI) and Rep. Diane DeGette (D-CO) who launched the 21st Century Cures Initiative in April 2014. On the Senate side, Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee leaders have initiated a process for drafting their version of a cures acceleration bill, often referred to as the Healthy Americans Act. Recent reports indicate Senate staff may release a draft bill in August or September.

Sources and Additional Information:

- The House-passed version of the bill can be viewed at https://www.congress.gov/114/bills/hr6/BILLS-114hr6rfs.pdf.

FEDERAL AGENCY AND ADMINISTRATION UPDATES AND NEWS

White House Releases Memo on Regulating Biotechnology Products

On July 2, the White House Office of Science and Technology (OSTP) released a memorandum titled “Modernizing the Regulatory System for Biotechnology Products” that applies to genetically engineered (GE) crops, animals, and microorganisms. The objective is to develop transparent and efficient regulatory practices for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to facilitate access for researchers and small businesses, and instill consumer confidence.

The memorandum directs the launch of a Biotechnology Working Group under the Emerging Technologies Interagency Policy Coordination Committee (ETIPC) that includes representatives from the White House, USDA, FDA, and EPA. The three main goals of the memorandum include: updating the current Coordinated Framework for the Regulation of Biotechnology (CF) to clearly describe the roles and responsibilities of EPA, USDA, and FDA in the regulatory process; developing a strategy, including user-friendly systems, to ensure responses to advances in future biotechnology products; and requesting a National Academies study to complete a forward-looking analysis of the future landscape of biotechnology products.

The White House is planning to organize upcoming listening sessions and other opportunities for stakeholders to provide input in the coming months.

Sources and Additional Information:

- The memorandum is available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/modernizing_the_reg_system_for_biotech_products_memo_final.pdf.
- The blog post announcing the memorandum is available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/07/02/improving-transparency-and-ensuring-continued-safety-biotechnology.
White House Releases FY 2017 Budget Priorities for Science and Technology

On July 9, the White House released its science and technology budget priorities for fiscal year (FY) 2017 via a memo issued jointly by the Office of Management and Budget and the Office of Science and Technology Policy. Despite the fact that Congress has yet to finalize FY 2016 appropriations, the FY 2017 priorities are intended to help agencies structure FY 2017 budget requests, due for release in February 2016.

Many of the priorities listed are the same as those in memos from previous years of the Administration. Priority areas of interest to ESA include global climate change; fundamental biological discovery; and the National Strategy for Biosurveillance, including infectious-disease forecasting. The memo serves primarily as a guideline and thus does not guarantee investments in these areas.

Sources and Additional Information:


USDA and NASA Announce Plans for Increased Collaboration

On July 13, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) pledged to increase collaboration on Earth science research, agricultural management, and a host of other issues. The NASA-USDA Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is the latest in a series of MOU's between the two agencies, the most recent of which was signed in 2010 and expired this year.

While the text of the MOU is not publicly available, this latest iteration is meant to spur cooperation on issues like the use of NASA's Soil Moisture Active Passive (SMAP) satellite and other assets to partner on climate and drought monitoring and to stimulate the formation of interagency working groups. However, it is unlikely that any new extramural funding opportunities would stem from this increased collaboration.

Sources and Additional Information:


NIH Announces Clinical Trial of West Nile Virus Vaccine

On July 6, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) announced that one of its institutes, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), will sponsor a clinical trial of a new investigational vaccine against West Nile virus. The press release from the agency explains that the disease is
transmitted to humans via mosquitoes and that 2,205 cases and 97 related deaths were reported in the U.S. in 2014. Developed by scientists at the Oregon National Primate Research Center at Oregon Health and Science University, the new vaccine was created using a hydrogen peroxide-based process that inactivates the virus while preserving surface structures that trigger the immune system. It will be tested in a Phase I clinical trial at Duke University, and enrollment in the trial is expected to be completed by December 2015.

Sources and Additional Information:


**NIH Requests Comments on Strategic Plan Framework**

On July 22, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) released a Request for Information (RFI) inviting the research community to provide feedback on a proposed framework for its five-year, agency-wide Strategic Plan being developed in response to a request from Congress. In the announcement, NIH welcomes comments on all aspects of the framework, including input on any additional cross-cutting themes that should be included in the plan. Responses must be submitted electronically through the designated website no later than August 16, 2015. NIH plans to provide a finalized Strategic Plan to Congress by the end of December 2015.

The outline included in the RFI includes an Overview to introduce the NIH mission and review the current scientific and budgetary landscape; Areas of Opportunity that Apply Across Biomedicine, including in the categories of fundamental science, health promotion and disease prevention, and treatments and cures; and Unifying Principles that address NIH priority-setting and stewardship. The framework was also discussed at recent meetings of the NIH Advisory Committee to the Director, and NIH is also planning to soon announce a series of webinars to allow for additional engagement with the stakeholder community.

Sources and Additional Information:

- Slides describing the framework, which were presented to the Advisory Committee to the Director can be viewed at [http://acd.od.nih.gov/slides/NIH_Strategic_Plan_ACD.pdf](http://acd.od.nih.gov/slides/NIH_Strategic_Plan_ACD.pdf).

**USDA and Microsoft Announce “Innovation Challenge” Prize to Address Food Resiliency**

On July 24, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced a partnership with Microsoft to launch an “Innovation Challenge” contest with over $60,000 available in prize money for the development of tools to help achieve better food resiliency.

The Innovation Challenge was developed in support of President Obama’s Climate Data Initiative, which was launched in March 2014 with an initial theme of coastal resiliency. The second theme, food
resilience, was announced in July 2014. This theme focuses on the vulnerability of America’s agricultural sector and the global food system as a result of climate change. The objective of the food resilience focus area is to leverage the federal government’s data resources to stimulate private sector innovation and collaboration to ensure the resiliency of the U.S. and global food systems against the impacts of climate change.

Building upon last summer’s announcement of the food resilience focus area, which had no associated federal funding opportunities but pushed for increased public-private partnerships, Microsoft has made over $60,000 available in prize funds for projects using USDA data sets to “provide actionable insights to farmers, agriculture businesses, scientists, or consumers.” Entries must be submitted by November 20, 2015, and eligible applicants include individuals, teams, and organizations.

Sources and Additional Information:

- Additional details on the Innovation Challenge, including how to submit an entry, are available at [http://usdaapps.challengepost.com/](http://usdaapps.challengepost.com/).