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ESA IN DC

*ESA Participates in 21st Annual CNSF Exhibition and Reception*

On April 29, ESA participated in the 21st Annual Coalition for National Science Funding (CNSF) Exhibition and Reception on Capitol Hill. ESA representatives Dr. R. Michael Roe, a William Neal Reynolds Distinguished Professor, and PhD candidate Ann Carr from North Carolina State University attended the event which allows scientists from research institutions and scientific organizations to showcase projects funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF). Dr. Daniel Sonenshine, Professor Emeritus and Eminent Scholar at Old Dominion University, also contributed to ESA’s presentation at the Exhibition.
As one of the 35 participating exhibitors, ESA had the opportunity to communicate with policymakers about the vital role of NSF in supporting basic research and training nationwide. In the society’s poster display, Dr. Roe and Ms. Carr discussed how their basic research on the biology of ticks has been critical to the development of new tools for the control and prevention of tick-borne diseases like Lyme disease.

Hundreds of individuals attended the event, including legislative staff, federal agency officials, scientific society representatives, and nine members of Congress, many of whom stopped by to view and discuss ESA’s presentation.

CNSF, of which ESA is a member, is an alliance of over 140 organizations united in support of increasing federal investment in NSF’s research and education programs.

Sources and Additional Information:


**ESA Joins Organizations in Holding Capitol Hill Briefing on Chikungunya**

On May 6, ESA teamed up with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA), and the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE) to host a briefing on Capitol Hill titled “Chikungunya? Combating the Spread of Mosquito-Borne Diseases in America.” Attended widely by Capitol Hill staff and representatives from federal agencies, the briefing provided an opportunity to educate the audience on the health and economic implications of chikungunya, the spread of the disease, and strategies to control the mosquitoes that carry it.

The event featured Dr. Grayson Brown, ESA Past President and Professor of Public Health Entomology at the University of Kentucky, who spoke about the mosquitoes that transmit chikungunya and the importance of controlling the vector. In addition to Dr. Brown, three other
speakers highlighted different aspects of the disease. Dr. Lyle Peterson, Director of the Division of Vector-Borne Diseases in the National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases at CDC, provided an overview of vector-borne diseases, and set the context for the briefing by highlighting chikungunya as an emerging threat in America. Dr. Harold Margolis, Chief of the Dengue Branch of CDC, spoke about the public health aspects and human health impacts of the disease. Finally, Dr. Carina Blackmore, Chief of the Bureau of Environmental Public Health Medicine at the Florida Department of Health, provided the broader epidemiological perspective of the spread of chikungunya.

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**ESA Science Policy Fellows Visit Washington, DC**

On May 12-14, the inaugural class of ESA Science Policy Fellows visited Washington, D.C. and attended meetings on Capitol Hill to advocate for the entomological sciences. The Fellows promoted ESA priorities and federal research funding recommendations for key agencies and offered ESA as a resource to legislative staff. The Fellows met with over 30 congressional offices and participated in a networking event with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Science & Technology Policy Fellows.

Launched in 2014, the ESA Science Policy Fellows Program accepts five new Fellows each year for a two-year term. During their time in the program, Science Policy Fellows engage in a variety of virtual and in-person educational events to learn about how science policy and science funding decisions are made on the federal level. Fellows are also provided the opportunity to engage with lawmakers, legislative staff, and federal agency leaders in Washington, DC. In November, the first class of Fellows convened at the ESA Annual Meeting in Portland, Oregon. The objective of the Science Policy Fellows program is to develop a generation of scientists who are visible and effective advocates for entomology and entomological research.

*Sources and Additional Information:*


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**CONGRESSIONAL UPDATES AND NEWS**

*Congress Agrees on Budget Resolution*

Earlier this month, Congress passed the *Concurrent Resolution on the Budget for Fiscal Year 2016* (Concurrent Resolution). The Concurrent Resolution, which governs Congress and does not require a presidential signature, creates a blueprint for the appropriations process, sets overall spending levels, and lays out a framework for future entitlement program changes such as repealing Obamacare.
The Concurrent Resolution keeps in place sequestration caps and sets overall funding for the appropriations process at practically the same level as fiscal year (FY) 2015 spending. However, the resolution uses Overseas Contingency Operations funding to increase defense spending above sequestration levels. Democrats in Congress and the President are opposed to only raising defense funding, instead of lifting the caps for both defense and non-defense spending. While the House has passed three of the FY 2016 appropriations bills, primarily by party-line votes, the President has threatened to veto these and any other bills that adhere to the sequester caps or only increase defense spending. Given the dispute about sequestration and other policy differences, the appropriations process is expected to be highly partisan and could end in a long-term continuing resolution if Democrats and Republicans are not able to agree on a budget deal to replace sequestration later this year.

Sources and Additional Information:

- The Senate 302(b) allocations for FY 2016 can be found at http://www.appropriations.senate.gov/sites/default/files/hearings/2016%20Senate%20Allocation%20May%202015%2C%202C%202016%20Senate%20Allocation%20May%20%201%2C%20%2015%202C%2015%20Filed.pdf.

House Appropriations Committee Approves FY 2016 NSF Funding Bill

On May 20, the full House Appropriations Committee considered and approved its version of the fiscal year (FY) 2016 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CJS) Appropriations bill, which provides funding for the National Science Foundation (NSF), among other agencies. Specifically, the Subcommittee’s version of the bill would provide an FY 2016 funding level of $7.394 billion, which is a 0.7 percent increase over the FY 2015 level, but well below the President’s budget request of $7.724 billion. The Coalition for National Science Funding (CNSF), of which ESA is a member, sent a letter on May 19 expressing the community’s concerns about the draft bill, including that the bill would provide an insufficient increase in NSF funding and report language accompanying the bill would result in cuts to the Geosciences and the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences Directorates.

The full committee action followed the May 14 mark-up of the bill by the House CJS Appropriations Subcommittee. In his opening remarks at the mark-up, Subcommittee Chairman John Culberson (R-TX) emphasized the bipartisan process that resulted in the bill, as well as the commitment to scientific research shared by him and Subcommittee Ranking Member Chaka Fattah (D-PA). Rep. Culberson expressed support for NSF and lamented that the committee did not have the resources to provide more funding, saying, “we may have additional funds later in the year, and will certainly do anything we can to prioritize that funding for the National Science Foundation.”
The bill is one of 12 annual spending measures that will be considered for FY 2016; at the time of this writing, the Energy and Water and Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriations bills have been approved by the full House while the Legislative Branch appropriations bill and the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development bill have been approved by the full Committee.

Sources and Additional Information:


House Agriculture Committee Holds Hearing on Pollinator Health

On Thursday, May 14, the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Biotechnology, Horticulture, and Research held a hearing on the federal coordination and response regarding pollinator health. Witnesses included Dr. Robert Johansson, Acting Chief Economist for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and Mr. Jim Jones, Assistant Administrator for the Office of Safety and Pollution Prevention of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). All of the Republican members were present with the exception of Representatives Chris Gibson (R-NY) and Jeff Denham (R-CA), while Ranking Member Suzan DelBene (D-WA) was the only Democrat in attendance.

Chairman Rodney Davis (R-IL) used his opening remarks to raise concerns about the lack of interagency coordination in addressing threats to pollinator health, especially those posed to honey bees by the parasitic mite Varroa destructor. He specifically pointed out that a report on the findings of the President’s task force to review pollinator health was five months overdue, complicating efforts to finalize a National Pollinator Health Strategy. (Note: the National Strategy was released on May 19 by the White House). The Chairman also characterized public and media scrutiny of neonicotinoids (neonics) and other pesticides as distracting from the more pressing issue of parasite-borne pathogens, implying that concerns over the use of such chemicals are exaggerated.

Questions from the Subcommittee focused primarily on competing views within the federal government on the role of neonics in declining bee populations. This issue was highlighted by the National Wildlife Refuge System’s recent decision to unilaterally ban the use of neonics and other biotech plants without consulting either the USDA or EPA. Only two months later, EPA released a report finding little to no overall benefits of neonic soybean seed treatment with almost no input from USDA. After the report’s release, USDA submitted a letter countering EPA’s findings. Despite what Chairman Davis described as “overwhelming consensus” on the primacy of the dangers posed by the Varroa destructor, Mr. Jones’s testimony also identified
poor nutrition, pesticide exposure, and biological genetics and breeding as the prime destabilizing forces in honey bee colonies.

Both Mr. Jones and Dr. Johansson made vague commitments to strengthen communication between their respective agencies in building a coordinated pollinator health strategy, especially with regards to research efforts and partnerships with land-grant universities. Their responses diverged, however, when more specific questions were asked. Regarding the EPA’s report on soybean seed treatment, Mr. Jones noted that the assessment had only considered the benefits of neonicots and did not incorporate potential risks, an approach with which Dr. Johansson disagreed. Both the Secretary of Agriculture and the EPA Administrator were appointed to co-chair the President’s Pollinator Health Task Force, yet neither witness could provide a specific, or even similar, timeline estimate as to when the Task Force’s report would be released.

Sources and Additional Information:


House Passes America COMPETES Act

On May 20, the House of Representatives considered and passed the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2015 (H.R. 1806), which would authorize FY 2016 and FY 2017 funding for the National Science Foundation (NSF), National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), research at the Department of Energy (DOE), the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education policy. Following a contentious and highly partisan markup of the bill on April 21 by the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, the legislation passed the full chamber on a vote 217-205, with a number of Republicans voting against party lines and all Democrats opposing. The bill will now move to the Senate, where it is unlikely to be considered in its current form. The White House has also threatened to veto the House bill.

As previously reported, the House COMPETES bill is an amalgam of legislation considered by the committee last year, including the FIRST Act (H.R. 4186), which covered NSF, NIST, OSTP, and STEM education, and the Department of Energy Research and Development Act (H.R. 4869), which covered DOE. In the 113th Congress, the FIRST Act was approved by the Science Committee but not the full chamber, while H.R. 4869 was not considered at the full Committee level. The new COMPETES bill keeps many of the problematic pieces from last year’s bills, including Directorate level authorization for NSF, as well as deep cuts for the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE) and Geosciences (GEO) directorates at NSF, and Biological and Environmental Research and ARPA-E at DOE. While the COMPETES funding
recommendations are not binding on the Appropriations Committees, they represent the Science Committee and broader House of Representatives’ priorities.

Several amendments were considered on the floor that would substantially increase the authorized funding levels and remove those provisions opposed by the scientific community. Once again Ranking Member of the House Science Committee Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) offered an amendment that would replace the entirety of the bill with a version that included significantly higher authorized funding. Rep. Bill Foster (D-IL) also proposed his same amendment to eliminate the section that would require grant recipients to show their proposal is “in the national interest.” Both amendments failed to garner the votes required for adoption. One successfully adopted amendment, offered by Congressman Morgan Griffith (R-VA), would give authority to the Speaker of the House and the Senate Majority Leader to appoint members to a STEM Education Advisory Panel that would advise the President.

Following introduction of the bill in early May, the National Science Foundation (NSF) released an impact statement outlining the specific implications that H.R. 1806 would have across the Foundation. The letter details each section of the legislation and illustrates how these provisions will impact NSF’s mission to fund innovative science and maintain the nation’s competitiveness.

On the same day as House consideration of COMPETES, a bipartisan group of seven senators led by Senators Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and Chris Coons (D-DE) introduced a standalone bill focusing solely on DOE Office of Science and Advanced Research Projects Agency – Energy (ARPA-E) programs. This bill would reauthorize the Office of Science and ARPA-E through 2020 and provide annual increases of 4 percent in authorized funding for five years.

Sources and Additional Information:

- Full text of the House bill, and a list of amendments considered on the floor can be found at https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/1806?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22H.R.+1806%22%5D%7D.
- Information on the Alexander-Coons DOE bill can be found at https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/1398?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22alexander%22%5D%7D.
- An archived webcast of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee markup and a list of amendments considered by the Committee can be found at http://science.house.gov/markup/hr-1806-america-competes-reauthorization-act-2015.
House Passes Flurry of Science Legislation

The House passed several science-related bills on May 20 under suspension of the rules, a method used to easily pass non-controversial legislation. The first bill, the International Science and Technology Cooperation Act of 2015 (H.R. 1156), would direct the White House to establish a new entity within the National Science and Technology Council that would seek to identify and coordinate areas where the U.S. can build partnerships with international scientific bodies.

The chamber also passed the Research and Development Efficiency Act of 2015 (H.R. 1119). The bill, offered by Congresswoman Barbara Comstock (R-VA), would require the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy to establish a working group to conduct a review of regulations that impact scientific research at U.S. universities.

Specifically, the bill would attempt to harmonize, streamline, and eliminate duplicative federal regulations and reporting requirements, minimize the regulatory burden on higher education institutions performing federally funded research, and ensure good stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

Sources and Additional Information:

- The text of H.R. 1156 can be found at https://www.congress.gov/114/bills/hr1156/BILLS-114hr1156rh.pdf.
- The text of H.R. 1119 can be found at https://www.congress.gov/114/bills/hr1119/BILLS-114hr1119rh.pdf.

Conference Travel Restriction Bill Introduced in House

On April 27, Congressman Blake Farenthold (R-TX) introduced H.R. 2032, a bill relating to federal conference travel sponsorship and attendance. Titled the “Government Spending Accountability Act of 2015” or “GSA Act of 2015” for short, the bill would put into place strict reporting requirements on federal agencies who sponsor or send employees to conferences, such as making public the prepared text of presentations, presentation slides, and detailed costs incurred in multiple categories. Many of these reporting requirements include information that large agencies, such as the Department of Health and Human Services, do not collect or collect only partially.

As mentioned in previous newsletters, this is not the first time the issue of conference travel has been the subject of congressional scrutiny. A 2012 scandal involving a General Services Administration (GSA) conference in Las Vegas resulted in the White House releasing a policy that put restrictions on conferences hosted by government agencies or attended by government employees. Since then, Congress has attempted to place additional restrictions on agencies and also included language in annual appropriations legislation that bars the White House from updating its policy to ease the impacts on certain types of conferences, like those attended by scientists or hosted by scientific societies.
**FEDERAL AGENCY AND ADMINISTRATION UPDATES AND NEWS**

*White House Unveils National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators*

On May 19, the White House Pollinator Health Task Force, co-chaired by the Secretary of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Gina McCarthy, released a National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators (Strategy). The extensive report includes a separate, stand-alone Research Action Plan that identifies five main priority areas: population trends and basic biology; environmental stressors; land management; habitat restoration; and knowledge curation such as data sharing or informatics.

Although the Strategy document outlines a variety of new initiatives and corresponding metrics for evaluation, it recognizes on-going federal efforts currently underway and urges collaboration, rather than duplication, across agencies. The Strategy is organized in the following sections: Public Outreach, Public-Private Partnerships, Increasing and Improving Pollinator Health, and Protecting Pollinators from Exposure to Pesticides. With respect to partnerships, the Strategy directs the Task Force to create a new Partnership Action Plan by the end of calendar year 2015. Throughout the Strategy, federal agencies are directed to use existing federal budgets to accomplish the initiatives, while also leveraging collaboration with outside partners.

**Sources and Additional Information:**

- The announcement from the White House is available at [https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/05/19/announcing-new-steps-promote-pollinator-health](https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/05/19/announcing-new-steps-promote-pollinator-health).
- The full Strategy is available at [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/Pollinator%20Health%20Strategy%202015.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/Pollinator%20Health%20Strategy%202015.pdf).
- The full Research Action Plan is available at [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/Pollinator%20Research%20Action%20Plan%202015.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/Pollinator%20Research%20Action%20Plan%202015.pdf).
**USDA Announces $235 Million for New Conservation Partnerships**

Early this month, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that $235 million would be available to fund new conservation partnerships through the U.S. Department of Agriculture Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). The RCPP was created in the 2014 Farm Bill to support innovative approaches to conservation through partnerships with local and non-government groups, companies, universities, and communities. The goal is to fund dynamic coalitions of stakeholders that will work to improve soil health, preserve clean water sources, protect wildlife habitats, and combat drought. Pre-proposals are due July 8, 2015.

*Sources and Additional Information:*


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**USDA Submits Comments Regarding EPA Findings on Neonicotinoids**

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) submitted comments countering a recent Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report investigating the benefits of neonicotinoid seed treatments to soybean production. The EPA report, which was released last October, stated that neonicotinoids “provide negligible overall benefits to soybean production in most situations. Published data indicate that in most cases there is no difference in soybean yield when soybean seed was treated with neonicotinoids versus not receiving any insect control treatment.”

The USDA Acting Chief Economist Robert Johansson issued a letter in early April calling the EPA report “incomplete” and stating “growers should have the ability to use the best tools available to manage pests that include choices in seed treatment and pest management tactics.”

*Sources and Additional Information:*


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**NIH Releases Statement for World Malaria Day**
On April 24, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) issued a statement on World Malaria Day 2015, highlighting the global impacts of malaria, as well as NIAID’s efforts to prevent and treat the mosquito-borne disease. In the statement, NIAID describes NIH-supported research to find alternatives to mosquito control, including alternatives to the repellant DEET. The press release, which was authored by NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci and NIAID Parasitology and International Programs Branch Chief Dr. Lee Hall, also recognizes the challenges presented by mosquito resistance to insecticides used for mosquito control and mentions NIAID-supported research on bait traps.

Sources and Additional Information: