January 5, 2015

IN THIS ISSUE

ESA IN DC

- Coalition for National Science Funding Congratulates New House Subcommittee Chairman
- ESA Signs Letter Urging Passage of FY 2015 Appropriations Bill Providing Increased NSF Funding

CONGRESSIONAL UPDATES AND NEWS

- Congress Reaches Agreement on FY 2015 Appropriations
- House and Senate Release Calendars for 114th Congress

FEDERAL AGENCY AND ADMINISTRATION UPDATES AND NEWS

- President Obama’s Immigration Executive Action: Provisions of Interest to the Research Community
- NSF Offers Prize for Digitization of “Bug Boxes”
- NSF Updates Transparency and Accountability Practices
- NIH to Require New Biosketch Format
- 2015 USDA Agricultural Outlook Forum Announced
- USDA Citrus Disease Subcommittee Meets
- EPA Requests Nominations for Science Advisory Board Agricultural Science Committee

ESA IN DC

Coalition for National Science Funding Congratulates New House Subcommittee Chairman

On December 2, the Coalition for National Science Funding (CNSF), of which ESA is a member, sent a letter to Representative John Culberson (R-TX) to congratulate him on his new appointment as Chairman of the House Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CJS) Appropriations Subcommittee in the next Congress convening in January. The CJS Appropriations Subcommittee is the subcommittee that determines annual funding levels for the National Science Foundation (NSF).
The CNSF letter expresses appreciation for Rep. Culberson’s long-time support of NSF and notes that the Congressman’s “continued commitment is essential at a time when federal investments in research agencies are not keeping pace with inflation.” The letter also expresses enthusiasm for working with the Chairman as he takes on his new role next year.

Sources and Additional Information:


---

**ESA Signs Letter Urging Passage of FY 2015 Appropriations Bill Providing Increased NSF Funding**

On November 14, ESA was among the 66 scientific societies and universities to sign a letter to Members of Congress urging the passage of an omnibus fiscal year (FY) 2015 appropriations bill providing increased federal investment in the National Science Foundation (NSF). The letter was spearheaded by the Coalition for National Science Funding (CNSF), of which ESA is a member.

The letter notes that “federal investments in research agencies are not keeping pace with inflation” and warns of a widening “innovation deficit” in the United States. In addition, NSF’s unique and important role is highlighted in the letter, as well as the agency’s need for “sustained federal investment to fulfill its mission.”

Congress has since passed a final package of FY 2015 appropriations bills, which included a funding level of $7.344 billion (an increase of 2.4 percent over FY 2014) for NSF for the remainder of the fiscal year (see related story below for more details).

Sources and Additional Information:


---

**CONGRESSIONAL UPDATES AND NEWS**

**Congress Reaches Agreement on FY 2015 Appropriations**

In December, Congress concluded negotiations and passed a final Continuing Resolution and Omnibus (CRomnibus) appropriations bill to fund federal government agencies for the remainder of fiscal year (FY) 2015, and the President signed the bill into law. Passage of the bill was nearly derailed due to policy “rider” provisions in the bill and objections over the
President’s recent executive action on immigration. In general, the bill sustains federal investments in research and education programs important to entomologists.

The bill includes funding for 11 of the 12 annual appropriations bills and upholds the $1.013 trillion spending cap for FY 2015 agreed to in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013 (the “Ryan-Murray” agreement). The final bill is also consistent with the $521 billion spending cap placed on defense and the $492 billion non-defense spending cap.

The more controversial bills, such as the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education bill and the Interior and Environment bill, narrowly avoided a full-year Continuing Resolution (CR) when agreements were reached over funding the healthcare reform law and various policy riders relating to regulatory actions by the Environmental Protection agency (EPA), among other issues. The only agency remaining under a CR is the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which would be funded through February 27, 2015. This action provides an avenue for the incoming Republican-led Congress to address the President’s recent executive actions on immigration, but the CR also will disrupt the operation of numerous federal agencies under the DHS umbrella.

Agency funding levels of interest to the Entomological Society of America include:

- The **U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA)** research programs fared well in the final FY 2015 appropriations CRomnibus bill, as several programs received an increase. The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is funded at $1.289 billion, an increase of $12.4 million (1.0 percent) over the FY 2014 enacted level. Within NIFA, the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) is funded at $325 million, a significant increase of $8.6 million (2.7 percent). For the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), the bill provides $1.178 billion, an increase of $55.1 million (4.9 percent) over the FY 2014 enacted level. Notably, the bill includes a provision (Sec. 749) exempting AFRI through FY 2015 from the 1:1 matching requirements that were mandated in the 2014 Farm Bill.

- The **National Science Foundation (NSF)** received funding above FY 2014 levels for all accounts. The CRomnibus provides NSF with $7.344 billion overall, which is $172.3 million above FY 2014, with an increase of $124.7 million to the Research and Related Activities (R&RA) account.

- The **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)** received $8.1 billion, a $60 million decrease from the FY 2014 enacted level. Since 2010, the Agency has experienced a 21 percent decrease in total funding. The CRomnibus bill cuts the Science and Technology account by 3.2 percent, for a total of $734.6 million for FY 2015. The bill provides $4.1 million for extramural research grants independent of the Science to Achieve Results (STAR) program to support water quality and availability research by not-for-profit organizations.

- The **U.S. Forest Service (FS)** received $5.1 billion for FY 2015, which is a decrease of $423.4 million or 7.7 percent below the FY 2014 enacted level. The Forest and Rangeland Research account sees a slight increase of $3.2 million (1.1 percent) above the FY 2014 enacted level. The Forest Health Management account is funded at $104.6 million, which is equal to what it received in FY 2014.

- The **National Institutes of Health (NIH)** received $30.084 billion, a $150 million (0.5 percent) increase above the FY 2014 enacted level. Within the NIH total budget, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) received $4.4 billion dollars plus an additional $238 million directed for Ebola research.
• The **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** received $6.9 billion, which includes funding for Ebola and transfers from the Prevention and Public Health (PPH) Fund. This is a slight increase (about 0.3 percent) above the FY 2014 enacted amount. The explanatory statement accompanying the bill also includes language encouraging CDC to expand activities related to Lyme disease.

• The **Department of Defense’s (DOD)** science and technology accounts received a 3.4 percent total increase above the FY 2014 enacted level. Defense basic research accounts are increased by 5.2 percent above the FY 2014 enacted level under the CRomnibus. While applied research (6.2) accounts are reduced slightly (less than 1 percent) from the current level, advanced technology development (6.3) programs are increased by 6.4 percent. Beyond core defense science and technology programs, defense health research accounts are increased by 11.5 percent above the current level under the CRomnibus.

Also of interest, the legislation includes provisions that prevent individual agencies from sending more than 50 agency representatives to an international conference. The explanatory report accompanying the bill details that the 50 employee cap per agency can be exceeded if the Secretary of State reports to congressional appropriators in advance detailing that attendance is “important to the national interest.” While this provision seems to apply to most scientific agencies, there is language in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) portion of the legislation that suggests HHS agencies (including NIH and CDC) may be exempt from the attendance cap if the conference is scientific in nature. It is still unclear how these provisions will be implemented for each agency.

Sources and Additional Information:


---

*House and Senate Release Calendars for 114th Congress*

House and Senate leadership have recently released their respective schedules for the 114th Congress. Both chambers will convene on Tuesday, January 6 for the start of the new session. The Senate, under the leadership of incoming Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), is now expected to work a full week; this is a departure from previous sessions where Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) typically held final votes on Thursday afternoons. The House will maintain four day work weeks.

Sources and Additional Information:


FEDERAL AGENCY AND ADMINISTRATION UPDATES AND NEWS

President Obama’s Immigration Executive Action: Provisions of Interest to the Research Community

President Obama addressed the nation on November 21 to announce actions implemented to alter the nation’s immigration system. Noting his frustration that Congress has still not acted on passing comprehensive immigration reform legislation, President Obama used executive action to make changes to the current immigration system. While the President’s plan focuses largely on border security and how to deal responsibly with the undocumented immigrants currently living in the U.S., the plan also included provisions to make it easier for high-skilled immigrants to stay in the country.

Relevant to the research and education communities, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) released a memorandum detailing new policies it will undertake to improve the employment-based visa system, enhance the visa system for foreign students and graduates from U.S. universities, and better promote research and development (R&D). Specific provisions of interest include:

- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the State Department will work together to ensure that all congressionally authorized visas are utilized when there is sufficient demand. (The memorandum notes that over the past decade, hundreds of thousands of authorized visas remained unissued despite sufficient demand.)
- USCIS and the State Department will also work together to improve the system for determining when in the fiscal year visas become available to applicants.
- USCIS will consider changing regulations to allow visas to remain valid when individuals switch jobs.
- Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and USCIS will solicit comments on expanding the degree programs eligible for Optional Practical Training (OPT).
- USCIS is directed to “clarify the standard by which a national interest waiver may be granted to foreign inventors, researchers, and founders of start-up enterprises to benefit the U.S. economy.” It also authorizes parole, or short-term entry to the United States, on a case-by-case basis to eligible inventors, researchers, and founders of start-up enterprises who have been awarded U.S. investor financing or who “otherwise hold the promise of innovation and job creation through the development of new technologies or the pursuit of cutting-edge research.”

Congressional Republicans have been outspoken in opposition to the President’s plan, as they feel the steps he has taken demonstrate significant overreach of presidential power. As mentioned in the above story, the Department of Homeland Security did not receive congressional appropriations through the end of fiscal year 2015, and instead remains under a continuing resolution through February 27, as a result of the President’s actions. Republican leaders have indicated they will reexamine the issue when the new Congress, with a Republican majority, convenes in the 2015.

Sources and Additional Information:
- More information on the President’s address and executive actions is available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2014/11/20/we-were-strangers-once-too-president-announces-new-steps-immigration.

- A summary of next steps and key questions and answers on the executive action are available at http://www.uscis.gov/immigrationaction.


---

**NSF Offers Prize for Digitization of “Bug Boxes”**

On December 5, the National Science Foundation (NSF), in partnership with the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS), announced the new “Beyond the Box Digitization Competition.” This competition will provide $1 million to one individual or team with an innovative technology to “accurately and efficiently capture digital images of insect specimens and their associated data from a standard museum drawer.”

This contest is an opportunity to support research addressing current limitations in insect research. Two current challenges with insect research are creating three-dimensional digital images and identifying the many specimens of insects currently unknown to researchers. By bringing together researchers and inventors, this competition hopes to foster new digital technology to help capture, identify, and describe insects, furthering the field as a whole and addressing the existing limitations with insect research. The contest will end on September 4.

Sources and Additional Information:

- More information on the “Beyond the Box Digitization Competition” is available at https://beyondthebox.aibs.org/.


---

**NSF Updates Transparency and Accountability Practices**

On December 3, the National Science Foundation (NSF) announced new efforts to improve the agency’s transparency and accountability. These include revisions to NSF’s guidelines for program officers and investigators, as well as regular updates to NSF’s transparency and accountability web page.
The changes emphasize the need to convey NSF projects’ significance and importance in the award titles and abstracts, which are made public on the NSF website. In the new guidelines, program officers are advised to ensure non-technical project descriptions to “serve as a public justification for NSF funding by articulating how the project serves the national interest, as stated by NSF’s mission: to promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity and welfare; or to secure the national defense.”

On December 26, the NSF Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide for principal investigators will also be updated to alert researchers receiving NSF awards that they may be contacted by the NSF program officer regarding preparation of the public award abstract and title.

In response to NSF’s actions, House Science, Space, and Technology Committee Chairman Lamar Smith (R-TX) released a statement applauding NSF’s announcement as “a step in the right direction” and expressing his interest in monitoring the implementation of the new policy. Over the past 18 months, Chairman Smith has voiced concerns about the NSF peer review system, specific NSF grants, and the relevance of NSF projects to the national interest.

Sources and Additional Information:

NIH to Require New Biosketch Format

On December 5, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) issued a Notice announcing that grant applicants will be required to use a new NIH Biographical Sketch (biosketch) format on applications submitted for due dates on or after May 25, 2015. Initially, NIH had planned for the new requirements to go into effect for the January 25, 2015 due date, but the agency subsequently announced a delay until May to provide additional flexibility. Applicants are permitted and encouraged to begin using the new format as soon as possible. NIH hopes the updated biosketch format will more accurately reflect the scientific accomplishments of researchers and allow researchers to better highlight contributions of team science.
Over the past year, NIH issued a Request for Information about the new biosketch and tested the format during a series of pilot Requests for Applications. The new format expands the page limit to five pages and allows applicants to describe their five most significant scientific contributions. Researchers may also list up to four supporting peer-reviewed publications and link to a comprehensive list of work through the use of the MyBibliography or SciENcv digital databases.

The revised forms and a series of FAQs are now available online, as well as a video with instructions for using SciENcv, a tool for creating biosketches for multiple federal agencies.

Sources and Additional Information:


2015 USDA Agricultural Outlook Forum Announced

On December 8, The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced the roster of speakers for the 2015 Agricultural Outlook Forum scheduled to take place on February 19-20 in Arlington, VA. The focus of this year’s Forum will be “Smart Agriculture in the 21st Century.”

The Forum will include presentations from Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, United States Trade Representative Chief Agricultural Negotiator Ambassador Darci Vetter, European Commissioner of Agriculture & Rural Development Phil Hogan, USDA Chief Economist Joseph Glauber, and President of the Council on Foreign Relations Richard Haass. In addition, representatives from John Deere and Company, Monsanto, American Farm Bureau Federation, and IBM Corporation will be featured in a panel discussion.

Topics to be discussed during the forum include: the connections between big data and agriculture, antimicrobial resistance, pollinator issues, the bio-economy, climate change, and many more. The Forum will feature luncheons, breakout sessions, dinner keynotes, and round table discussions.

Sources and Additional Information:
USDA Citrus Disease Subcommittee Meets

On December 9-10, the USDA Subcommittee on Citrus Disease met in Lake Alfred, FL. This meeting was an opportunity to discuss and propose the research agenda, budget, and focus areas for the upcoming year’s Citrus Disease Research and Extension Program. In a press release covering the event, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack emphasized the current hardships for the citrus industry and the importance of combating citrus greening and other diseases. The Citrus Disease Subcommittee and the Citrus Disease Research and Extension Program were mandated in the Agricultural Act of 2014 (2014 Farm Bill) in an effort to promote research surrounding citrus diseases. This is the second time the Citrus Disease Subcommittee has held a meeting since it was established.

Sources and Additional Information:


EPA Requests Nominations for Science Advisory Board Agricultural Science Committee

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced open nominations for the Science Advisory Board (SAB) Agricultural Science Committee, a new agriculture-related committee of the SAB. The new committee will advise the SAB on issues that relate to farming and agriculture industries, after consultation with the Secretary of Agriculture. Applicants with the following expertise are encouraged to apply: agronomy, agricultural chemistry, agricultural engineering, crop science, biofuels engineering, biotechnology, and forestry. Nominations are due January 30, 2015.

Sources and Additional Information:

This month, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released a report on the status of implementing pesticide regulation in the *Endangered Species Act*. The federal report builds off of a 2013 National Academy of Sciences (NAS) report titled “Assessing Risks to Endangered and Threatened Species from Pesticides” and satisfies a provision in the 2014 Farm Bill mandating an interagency report to examine the NAS recommendations and develop an action plan.

The report details the steps many federal agencies have initiated in the wake of the NAS report, including establishing collaborative partnerships with delineated roles and responsibilities, improving the transparency of the review process, and developing a plan with a timeline for pesticide compounds. Additionally, two joint agency workshops were held, along with a variety of stakeholder meetings and workshops. This is another indication that EPA and other agencies will continue to redefine approaches to pesticides with respect to endangered and threatened populations.

Sources and Additional Information:
