



# Science Policy News

Entomological Society of America Science Policy News

**FEBRUARY 2017**

## **ESA's Science Policy Platform**

The Entomological Society of America (ESA) is a non-partisan scientific organization. We represent a broad spectrum of opinions united under one principle: the promotion and advancement of scientific inquiry, discovery, and communication. A key component of our mission is to enable our members to share their science globally. We join coalitions of scientific societies to further our mission; employ policy specialists to assist in our decision-making; provide accurate scientific input to lawmakers, agency leaders, and other community stakeholders; and develop and support programming to educate scientists about the importance of scientific advocacy. A recent *Entomology Today* [blog post](#) outlined our science policy program. If you have questions, comments, or concerns about ESA's science policy platform, [please send us your feedback](#).

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### **ESA IN DC**

### ***ESA Sends Letter of Appreciation to Former CDC Director, Dr. Thomas Frieden***

To express appreciation for his years of leadership over the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the current and past presidents of ESA sent a letter of gratitude on behalf of the society to Director Thomas Frieden. Dr. Frieden, who has served as director since 2009, played a pivotal role in responding to public health crises such as the emergence of Zika and other insect-borne diseases and has stressed the importance of policy informed by science as well as funding for both the research and implementation of subsequent strategies. He has also emphasized the importance of entomologists in the public health community. Upon receiving the letter, Dr. Frieden thanked ESA for "your words and your works."

As a political appointee, protocol dictated Dr. Frieden tender his resignation and step down on January 20, 2017. Until the next CDC director is appointed by the President, a position that does not require Senate approval, Rear Admiral Anne Schuchat, M.D., will be acting CDC director.

#### *Sources and Additional Information:*

- The letter to Dr. Frieden is available at <http://www.entsoc.org/sites/default/files/files/ESA-thanks-outgoing-CDC-Director-Frieden.pdf>

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### ***ESA President Susan Weller Publishes Letter to the Editor in Wall Street Journal***

On January 5, *The Wall Street Journal* published "In the Fight Against Zika, Insecticides Hit a 'Dead End,'" which discussed the threat of insecticide resistance and the economics of combating the spread of Zika. The Society issued a response to counter the pessimistic view of the article and reinforce the efforts of the entomological community to stem the spread of vector-borne diseases.

ESA President Susan Weller and the President of the American Mosquito Control Association, Capt. Stanton Cope, submitted a letter to the editor that was published on January 19, titled "Progress and Some Obstacles to Zapping Zika," highlighting the ongoing research investigating new ways to combat the spread of the disease. The ESA/AMCA letter also advocated for a multi-pronged approach to mosquito management involving public education, improving the living conditions of affected populations, minimizing regulatory hurdles, and simple tactics like reducing standing water and increasing the use of window screens and nets.

#### *Sources and Additional Information:*

- The ESA/AMCA letter published in *The Wall Street Journal* is available at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/progress-and-some-obstacles-to-zapping-zika-1484772825> (subscription required).
- The original, unabridged letter as submitted to the *Journal* is available at <http://www.entsoc.org/sites/default/files/ESA%20-%20AMCA%20-%20letter%20to%20Wall-Street-Journal.pdf>.

- The original article in *The Wall Street Journal* can be found at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/fight-against-zika-nears-dead-end-1483621245> (subscription required).
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### ***ESA President Susan Weller Writes Blog Post Addressing Federal Communication Freeze***

On January 26, ESA published a blog post in *Entomology Today* reinforcing the Society's support for the free exchange of scientific research and information following a freeze on external communications at certain federal agencies, particularly the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Dr. Susan Weller, the current ESA president and author of the article, expressed concern that recent actions taken by the new Presidential Administration are threatening the independent exchange of research and ideas that inform public policy. Dr. Weller encouraged members of the scientific community to advocate for their respective research by getting involved, staying informed, and speaking up. The Administration has attempted to reassure the scientific community that the freeze is only a temporary measure, but it is too early to tell how it could affect scientific research in the future.

*Sources and Additional Information:*

- The full blog post is available at <https://entomologytoday.org/2017/01/26/esa-supports-free-exchange-of-scientific-information-and-evidence-based-policy/>.
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### ***AAAS Publishes Letter to New Administration Opposing Immigration Ban***

On January 31, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) published a letter to the new Administration in response to the recent executive order banning immigrants from seven predominantly Muslim countries. AAAS emphasized that scientific progress is contingent on the free flow of people and ideas and that international collaboration is a critical component of the American scientific enterprise.

This policy could discourage future engineers, doctors, researchers, academics, and others from studying at universities, attending scientific conferences, or starting businesses in the United States, which could have long-term, adverse effects on our global competitiveness. ESA signed on to this letter along with 151 other universities, scientific societies, private sector organizations, nonprofits and others, to demonstrate the widespread support for the international scientific community.

*Sources and Additional Information:*

- The full letter responding to the immigration ban is available at <https://mcmprodaaas.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/Multisociety%20Letter%20on%20Immigration%20-31-2017.pdf>.
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## CONGRESSIONAL UPDATES AND NEWS

### ***Senate Confirmation Hearing for EPA Administrator Nominee, Scott Pruitt***

On January 18, the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works (Senate EPW) held a confirmation hearing for President Trump's nominee for Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt. Partisan divisions were apparent from the outset, with Senate EPW Members clashing with Pruitt and each other on a range of issues including Pruitt's environmental record, climate science, and EPA's regulatory powers. Pruitt is likely to be confirmed, though the vote will almost certainly fall along party lines.

One major point of contention was the issue of climate change. During the hearing, Pruitt acknowledged that climate change is occurring but expressed doubts about the extent to which human activity is impacting it. Senate EPW Democrats highlighted this as a basis for their concern over his nomination, with Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) stating that he would not vote for a nominee who did not recognize the scientific consensus on the role that greenhouse gas emissions are playing in climate change. Pruitt responded to such criticisms by stressing that all policies adopted by EPA under his leadership would be based on "objective" science.

Both Democrats and Republicans on the Committee questioned Pruitt about his views on EPA's role as a regulator. As Oklahoma Attorney General, Pruitt led numerous lawsuits against EPA on the basis that the agency was overstepping statutory limitations on its rulemaking powers. Senate EPW Democrats attempted to characterize these lawsuits as evidence that Pruitt would not exercise the authority necessary to regulate environmental quality. Pruitt argued that his past legal actions as Attorney General were focused on the rulemaking process and did not reflect blanket opposition to EPA's ability to curb carbon emissions or limit groundwater contamination. This view was validated by Senate EPW Republicans, many of whom expressed concerns that EPA under the Obama Administration had abused its regulatory authority and consequently stifled economic growth.

EPA-supported science was rarely discussed; however, Senator Mike Rounds (R-SD) expressed concerns about the composition of the EPA Science Advisory Board (SAB). Rounds urged Pruitt to encourage more diverse geographic representation on the EPA SAB and to include more state and local entities in its membership. It is expected that the Committee will report a favorable recommendation to the full Senate on February 1.

#### *Sources and Additional Information:*

- The full confirmation hearing and written testimony is available at <http://www.epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/hearings?ID=1FC50BFE-C59F-4815-86F8-E463582935A6>.

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### ***Senate Confirmation Hearing for Commerce Nominee, Wilbur Ross***

On January 18, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation (Commerce Committee) held a confirmation hearing for President Trump's nominee for Secretary of Commerce, Wilbur Ross. Ross, worth an estimated \$2.5 billion, is an

experienced private equity investor that advised President Trump on trade and economic issues during his campaign.

Senator Bill Nelson (D-FL) opened the confirmation hearing with direct questions about Ross' position regarding climate science research performed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and pressed the nominee to make a commitment to prevent scientists from being "gagged" by those that refute the legitimacy of climate science. Ross, a Florida resident, acknowledged the increasing frequency and severity of serious storms and the need to establish resilient coastal communities, including an effective and timely warning system for serious weather events.

Senator Brian Shatz (D-HI) touched on the topic of research infrastructure, inquiring as to how Ross expected to address pressing climate issues in a stagnant budget environment. Ross recognized the importance of continuing existing NOAA programs, something he would address during the appropriations process. The Commerce Committee voiced no objections to Ross' nomination, which will now proceed to the full chamber for a vote.

*Sources and Additional Information:*

- The full confirmation hearing is available at [http://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/US/2017/01/18/Watch-live-Wilbur-Ross-confirmation-hearing-for-Commerce/1571484740643/](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2017/01/18/Watch-live-Wilbur-Ross-confirmation-hearing-for-Commerce/1571484740643/).

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### ***Senate Confirmation Hearing for Interior Nominee, Rep. Ryan Zinke***

On January 17, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee (Energy Committee) held a confirmation hearing for President Trump's nomination for Secretary of the Department of Interior (DOI), Representative Ryan Zinke (R-MT). Zinke was elected to Congress in 2014 and currently serves on the House Committee on Natural Resources. A former Montana state senator and Navy SEAL veteran, Zinke received a B.S. in Geology from the University of Oregon.

Throughout the hearing, Zinke maintained that he would channel President Teddy Roosevelt as Secretary of Interior, creating a "bold vision" for the next 100 years, emphasizing a balance between conservation and energy development. Questions throughout the hearing ranged in topic from Zinke's interest in re-examining the federal coal leasing program, to his commitment to address the \$12.5 billion backlog in maintenance of the National Park Service, to his support for a permanent Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) inquired on federal funding for DOI's scientists and programs. Zinke recognized the "great scientists" at the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and committed to maintaining federal funding. Zinke also expressed that "management decisions should be based on objective science," while recommending an increase in public-private research partnerships. Senator Stabenow's comment on the threat of invasive species, specifically referencing Michigan's Asian Carp, received support from Zinke as well.

Responding to questions from Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Zinke disagreed with the President's campaign tweet that the concept of global warming is a hoax created by the

Chinese. While Zinke explained that he does not agree with that position, he maintained there is an ongoing debate about the role of human contribution to climate change and how to respond to it. Additionally, while Zinke has disagreed with GOP leadership on issues like transferring ownership of public lands, some environmental groups remain concerned that his support for a local approach to wildlife management will erode the Endangered Species Act.

Although the four-hour hearing concluded without a scheduled vote, it is expected that the Committee will report a favorable recommendation to the full Senate.

*Sources and Additional Information:*

- The full confirmation hearing is available at <http://www.energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/hearings-and-business-meetings?ID=94350246-9CD0-4F7B-A8AD-66681E788ABD>.

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## **FEDERAL AGENCY AND ADMINISTRATION UPDATES AND NEWS**

### ***Former Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue Nominated for Ag. Secretary***

On January 18, President Trump announced his selection of Sonny Perdue as his nominee for Secretary of Agriculture. Perdue grew up on a farm in Georgia and earned both his undergraduate and Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from the University of Georgia. Prior to running for office, he worked as a small business owner. Perdue began his career in politics in 1990, winning election as a Democrat to the Georgia State Senate and running successfully for governor as a Republican in 2000. At the end of his two terms, he was named the Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO) 2009 Governor of the Year for his focus on increasing agricultural sustainability, developing alternative fuels, and supporting biomedical research. Since then he has run the company Perdue Partners, which is in the global agricultural commodities trade.

The confirmation hearing date has not yet been set but is expected sometime in mid-to-late February. This was the last position to be filled in President Trump's cabinet. Perdue has experience in public service and is well-versed in the challenges of the agricultural community, though some have raised concerns about his positions on environmental, ethical, and social issues.

*Sources and Additional Information:*

- More information on Perdue's nomination is available at [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/18/us/politics/sonny-perdue-agriculture-secretary.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/18/us/politics/sonny-perdue-agriculture-secretary.html?_r=0)
- More information on Perdue's BIO Governor of the Year award is available at [http://sonnyperdue.georgia.gov/00/press/detail/0,2668,78006749\\_136688711\\_139078727,00.html](http://sonnyperdue.georgia.gov/00/press/detail/0,2668,78006749_136688711_139078727,00.html)

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### ***CDC Awards Nearly \$184 Million to Continue the Fight Against Zika***

In late December, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced nearly \$184 million in funding to continue to combat and prevent the spread of Zika virus. Part of the \$350 million provided to CDC under the *Zika Response and Preparedness Appropriations Act of 2016*, funds will be distributed to states, territories, localities, and universities in an effort to better understand the long-term health effects of the virus, particularly microcephaly. Specifically, funds will be allocated to promote the following activities: public health emergency preparedness and response, Zika epidemiology and laboratory capacity activities, birth defect surveillance, vector-borne disease regional centers of excellence, and a vector control unit in Puerto Rico. The remaining funds will go toward the provision of emergency assistance to affected areas, expanding vector control efforts at the state level, and increasing information transfer between health care providers and the public.

*Sources and Additional Information:*

- More information about the award is available at <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2016/p1222-zika-funding.html>.

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### ***EPA Finalizes Steps to Better Protect Bees from Pesticides***

On January 12, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued an official policy statement regarding pollinator health and the regulation of potentially harmful pesticides. The *Policy to Mitigate the Acute Risk to Bees from Pesticide Products* policy would limit the spray of pesticides to the hours and weather conditions when bees would most likely be dormant. It also provides increased flexibility for applicators, allowing leeway as to when and how often chemicals that retain their toxicity for short time periods can be sprayed.

EPA encourages states and localities to develop their own pollinator health preservation strategies to minimize the damage to species critical to our nation's health and economic progress. The publication of this rule follows an incident late last year in which millions of honeybees were killed in Dorchester County, South Carolina, when a toxic pesticide intended to target the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito was sprayed incorrectly. It is unclear how the recent freeze in new regulations will affect the implementation of this rule, but it could be an opportunity for the Society to offer its expertise to federal agencies in the future.

*Sources and Additional Information:*

- The press release announcing the new pesticide rule is available at <https://www.epa.gov/pesticides/epa-finalizes-steps-better-protect-bees-pesticides>.

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### ***APHIS Extends Public Comment Period for Proposed Rule Regarding Interstate Transportation of Plant Pests***

On January 19, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) extended the comment period for a proposed rule regarding the movement of plant pests and "biological control organisms" across state lines. The most

significant change resulting from the proposed rule change would be the establishment of criteria for the movement and deployment of these weed and pest control organisms.

APHIS suggests granting exemptions from certain permitting requirements that would allow for the unregulated transportation of particular plant pests across state lines. This would replace an existing rule and provide clarifying language regarding the criteria that is considered when evaluating the risks and potential consequences of the interstate transportation of certain organisms. Certain soil regulations may also undergo reconsideration. The deadline for comments, which may be submitted electronically or by mail, is **March 20**.

*Sources and Additional Information:*

- The full Federal Register notice of proposed rulemaking and form to submit comments is available at <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/01/19/2017-00532/plant-pest-regulations-update-of-provisions>.