

AIBS news

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AIBS *news*

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New *BioScience* Editorial Board Member

AIBS is pleased to announce that Charlene D'Avanzo, of Hampshire College, has joined the *BioScience* Editorial Board. She will have special responsibility for education articles, and replaces Gordon E. Uno, of the University of Oklahoma, who has stepped down after serving in the role for 18 years. Editorial Board members advise the editor in chief about all aspects of manuscript selection and editing. AIBS extends its gratitude and appreciation to both for their willingness to serve AIBS and biology education by advising on expert peer review of *BioScience* articles.

AIBS Participating in the Combined Federal Campaign

Federal employees may now contribute to AIBS through the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC; see www.opm.gov/cfc/). The mission of the CFC is to “promote and support philanthropy through a program that is employee focused, cost-efficient, and effective in providing all federal employees the opportunity to improve the quality of life for all.”

According to the federal Office of Personnel Management, the CFC is the world's largest and most successful annual workplace charity campaign, with more than 300 CFC campaigns throughout the country and internationally. Pledges made by federal civilian, postal, and military donors during the campaign season (1 September to 15 December) support eligible nonprofit organizations.

The AIBS CFC number is 69973. To make a contribution to AIBS, please visit www.aibs.org/donate/.

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AIBS Director of Public Policy Robert Gropp stands with Representative Mike Simpson after he received his award from the USGS Coalition. Photograph: Julie Palakovich Carr.

USGS Coalition Hosts Capitol Hill Reception, Honors Members of Congress

Representatives Jim Moran (D–VA) and Mike Simpson (R–ID) are the recipients of the 2010 USGS Coalition Leadership Award. The two were honored for their continuing support for the US Geological Survey (USGS) at the annual USGS Coalition congressional reception on 20 September. The reception is an annual event sponsored by the USGS Coalition, an alliance of more than 70 organizations united by a commitment to the continued vitality of the unique combination of biological, geological, hydrological, and mapping programs of the USGS.

Representative Moran is chairman of the House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Environment and Representative Simpson is the ranking member.

“The USGS Coalition is pleased to honor Representatives Moran and Simpson,” said Robert Gropp, cochair of the USGS Coalition and AIBS director of public policy. “They understand how important USGS science is to the nation and that funding for the USGS is an investment that pays returns in the form of improved public safety from natural hazards, wise ecosystem management, and improved conservation of biological diversity. The USGS is much more than the science agency for the Department of the Interior. Data and products developed by the USGS and its highly skilled workforce are vital to our economy and can help drive the development of new products and markets.”

In addition to honoring Moran and Simpson, the reception highlighted research, information sharing, and services provided by the USGS. This year, nearly 200 individuals representing

scientific societies, government agencies, and congressional offices attended the reception.

Interior Includes Some Key AIBS Recommendations in Final Scientific Integrity Policy

Recently, the US Department of the Interior (DOI) announced a new secretarial order establishing a DOI-wide policy intended to ensure the integrity of the science and scientific products used in departmental decisionmaking and policy development. The directive comes less than two weeks after a public comment period closed on a draft scientific integrity policy that was criticized by AIBS.

In a 17 September letter to Secretary Salazar, AIBS expressed support for a strong DOI-wide scientific integrity policy and noted that such a policy could increase public trust in DOI decisionmaking. AIBS also warned that the draft DOI policy failed to establish a system that would protect DOI scientists and scientific findings from political interference or manipulation in service of a policy agenda. AIBS expressed concern that the draft policy was confusing and vague and lacked appropriate employee protections and guidance, failed to provide timelines for implementation, and failed to cover the actions of decisionmakers.

"The directive issued by Secretary Salazar is an improvement from the draft policy," said AIBS Executive Director Richard O'Grady. The policy issued specifically responds to AIBS's concern that the policy must apply to all DOI employees. According to the secretarial order, the policy applies to all employees "when they engage in, supervise or manage scientific activities, analyze or publicly communicate information resulting from scientific activities, or use this information or analysis in making agency policy." Importantly, the policy also applies to all contractors, volunteers, and permittees.

Although the secretarial order is a significant improvement from the draft policy, it can still be strengthened.

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"The policy still relies on each bureau to develop its own processes for investigating claims of misconduct," said Robert Gropp, director of public policy at AIBS. "It might be more efficient for DOI to provide a standard from which each bureau could develop its processes for investigating claims of misconduct."

"We look forward to seeing how the policy is implemented across Interior," O'Grady said. "If done correctly, the public trust will grow in DOI decisions."

AIBS, ESA Issue Open Letter on Importance of Science Collections

On 16 September, AIBS and the Ecological Society of America (ESA) issued an open letter calling attention to the increasing importance of natural science collections, living and nonliving, worldwide. The statement was prompted by reports that Russia was moving forward with a plan to auction off land associated with the Pavlovsk Experiment Station near St. Petersburg. Destruction of the site could have led to the loss of more than 5000 distinct varieties of fruit trees and plants, most of which are extinct or endangered around the world.

Importantly, however, the threat to the Russian research station is merely one recent and public challenge to natural science collections around the world. As AIBS and the ESA noted: "Lack of funds, loss of technically trained staff and inadequate protection against natural disasters, are jeopardizing natural science collections worldwide. For example, in May of this year an accidental fire destroyed roughly 80,000 of the 500,000 venomous snake—and an estimated 450,000 spider and scorpion—specimens at the Butantan Institute in São Paulo, Brazil. The 100-year-old collection featured some rare and extinct species and contributed to the development of numerous vaccines, serums and antivenoms. The building that housed these specimens, including what may have been the largest collection of snakes in the world, lacked fire alarm or sprinkler systems."

AIBS President Joseph Travis said: "Biological collections, whether living or non-living, are vitally important to humanity. Natural science collections have provided insights into a wide variety of biological issues and pressing societal problems. These research centers help identify new food sources, develop treatments for disease and suggest how to control invasive pests. Natural science collections belong to the world and cannot be limited by geographic borders."

To read the complete text of the open letter, please go to www.aibs.org/position-statements/20100916_aibs_esa_statem.html.

AIBS Asks Senate to Support Public Access to Independent Scientific Research Assessments

On 5 September, AIBS joined 13 other scientific organizations to express concern "with the issue of intellectual property rights and ownership of research results that arise in the aftermath of incidents caused by industry, most recently, the British Petroleum oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico." In a letter delivered to every US senator, the groups stated that the "public needs access to results and conclusions not affected by legal wrangling or private ownership. We are writing specifically to request that a source of independent funding for research on actual or potential industry impacts be available and dispersed from an independent source."

To read the complete letter, go to www.aibs.org/position-statements/20100915_september_2010.html.

Public Policy Office to Offer Two Graduate Student Programs in 2011

The AIBS Public Policy Office is pleased to announce that in 2011 it will offer two programs that provide graduate students first-hand experience with science policy development in the nation's capital.

AIBS will once again offer the Emerging Public Policy Leadership Award (EPPLA). This national competition recognizes outstanding graduate

students who demonstrate leadership potential and an interest in working at the interface of science and public policy. Recipients of the award become part of a growing alumni network, receive a trip to Washington, DC, to attend a briefing and participate in meetings with members of Congress, and receive a complementary one-year AIBS membership. For more information about the EPPLA program, please visit www.aibs.org/public-policy/student_opportunities.html. The 2011 application requirements are available at this site.

Additionally, AIBS is pleased to announce that in 2011 it will once again offer, in conjunction with the American Society of Mammalogists, a unique paid internship opportunity for a graduate student to work for three months in the AIBS Public Policy Office in downtown Washington, DC. Application information will be available on the American Society of Mammalogists Web site at www.mammalsociety.org and the AIBS Web site at www.aibs.org.

Recent Modules Online at www.actionbioscience.org

"Using Socioscientific Issues-based Instruction" This module examines socioscientific issues-based instruction, why it is effective, and how to implement it in the classroom. The complete module is available at www.actionbioscience.org/educators/socioscientific.html.

This module includes six accompanying activities to use in the classroom.

- Who Owns Rights to Pharmacogenetic Information? (www.actionbioscience.org/educators/example1.html)
- Human Cloning: Is it Biological Plagiarism? (www.actionbioscience.org/educators/example2.html)
- Has Our Knowledge of Neuroscience Led to Ethical Dilemmas? (www.actionbioscience.org/educators/example3.html)

- Extinction: Is It Inevitable? (www.actionbioscience.org/educators/example4.html)
- Which Strategy Is Best to Ensure the Conservation of Endangered Species? (www.actionbioscience.org/educators/example5.html)
- How Can Both Human Well-being and Environmental Degradation Be Increasing? (www.actionbioscience.org/educators/twta1.html)

Recent Public Policy Reports Online at www.aibs.org/public-policy-reports

Public Policy Report for 27 September

- **Storm clouds build, NAS releases *Gathering Storm II*.** On 23 September, the National Academies released a new report warning that "America's ability to compete for quality jobs in the global economy continues to deteriorate, and the nation needs a sustained investment in education and basic research to spur innovation and keep its competitive position from slipping further." The warning was issued in *Rising Above the Gathering Storm, Revisited: Rapidly Approaching Category 5*, a report prepared by some of the authors of the influential 2005 report *Rising Above the Gathering Storm*.
- **Reports recommend improvements in STEM education.** Mid-September marked the rollout of two major reports on the future of science education. A proposal from the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) recommends a two-pronged approach to improve K-12 science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education. "We must prepare students so they have a strong foundation in STEM subjects and are able to use this knowledge in their personal

and professional lives,” wrote John Holdren and Eric Lander, coauthors of PCAST, in their introduction to the report. “And we must inspire students so that all are motivated to study STEM subjects in school and many are excited about the prospect of having careers in STEM fields.”

- **Russian seed bank receives temporary reprieve.** The Pavlovsk Experiment Station and its living plant collections in Russia have been threatened by plans to convert the facility into commercial development. A Russian court had rejected pleas to halt a planned land auction. However, following international expressions of concern, the facility has received a temporary reprieve. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev recently intervened in the matter and ordered a review of the proposed redevelopment plan. This has resulted in a delay of the land auction until October. Meanwhile, an independent, international commission will be established to assess the value of the plant collection. The station houses Europe’s largest collection of fruits and berries. More than 90 percent of the collection is reportedly found in no other research collection or gene bank.
- **Government-funded stem cell research awaits court action.** Research involving human embryonic stem cells has resumed

at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) after a court order suspended the work for two weeks. On 9 September, a federal appeals court suspended a preliminary injunction that halted NIH in-house research. The injunction was a result of a pending lawsuit filed by opponents of human embryonic stem cell research.

Public Policy Report for 13 September

- **NIH halts intramural stem cell research.** The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has stopped all of its internal research involving human embryonic stem cells (hESCs). The move came in response to a recent ruling by a federal court that halts federal funding of research involving hESCs. Lawyers at the Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees the NIH, determined that the court’s preliminary injunction applies to intramural research at the agency. Consequently, NIH researchers on eight projects have been forced to stop their work on hESCs.
- **Review panel finds fault with IPCC.** An independent panel has called for changes in the way the United Nations handles its assessments of climate change. Although the panel found that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate

Change (IPCC) has been “successful overall,” it needs to improve its governance and management, review process, characterization and communication of uncertainty, and transparency.

- **Judge blocks investigation of climate researcher by Virginia attorney general.** A judge has blocked an investigation of climate researcher Michael Mann launched by Virginia Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli (R). Cuccinelli, a vocal climate skeptic, was investigating whether Mann had committed fraud while applying for research grants to study climate change. The county circuit court judge ruled that Cuccinelli’s subpoena of hundreds of documents from Mann’s former employer, the University of Virginia, was unfounded. Judge Paul Peatross Jr. ruled that Cuccinelli failed to demonstrate that Mann had committed fraud while a professor at University of Virginia: “The nature of the conduct is not stated so that any reasonable person could glean what Dr. Mann did to violate the statute,” the judge wrote. “The Court...understands the controversy regarding Dr. Mann’s work on the issue of global warming. However, it is not clear what he did that was misleading, false or fraudulent in obtaining funds from the Commonwealth of Virginia.”