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AIBS NAMES EMERGING PUBLIC POLICY LEADERS *UC-Davis, U. Maryland and U. Rhode Island Graduate Students Receive Awards*

WASHINGTON, DC – The American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) has selected **Meredith Niles**, a graduate student at the University of California, Davis, **Ryan Richards**, a graduate student at the University of Maryland, College Park, and **Leslie Smith**, a graduate student at the University of Rhode Island, to receive the 2010 AIBS Emerging Public Policy Leadership Award (EPPLA).

“AIBS is committed to fostering a productive dialogue between policymakers and scientists,” said AIBS Executive Director Dr. Richard O’Grady. “We applaud Meredith Niles, Ryan Richards, and Leslie Smith for exemplifying this commitment through their work.”

Since 2003, AIBS has recognized the achievements of biology graduate students who have demonstrated an interest and aptitude for contributing to science and public policy. AIBS will bring Niles, Richards, and Smith to Washington, DC, in April to meet with their Congressional delegations and to attend a briefing on the federal budget for scientific research. These events are in conjunction with the annual Biological and Ecological Sciences Coalition (BESC) Congressional Visits Day. Niles, Richards, and Smith will also receive a certificate and one-year membership in AIBS, which includes a subscription to the journal *BioScience*.

“By participating in the 2010 Congressional visits event, Meredith, Ryan, and Leslie are playing an important role in bridging the communication gap between our nation’s policymakers and the scientific community,” said AIBS Director of Public Policy Dr. Robert Gropp.

“Engendering collaborations between scientists and policymakers is vital for the continuation and success of both disciplines,” said Niles. “I hope to be a part of the future generation making such efforts possible.”

Niles is a former Fulbright Scholar who is pursuing a Ph.D. in ecology at the University of California, Davis. Her thesis research on sustainable agriculture practices has implications for climate change mitigation and adaptation. She is a trainee of the National Science Foundation’s (NSF) Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship (IGERT) program. Her work has included directing a national campaign to increase public awareness of the effects of climate on food production. Niles is also a former employee of the U.S. Department of State, where she worked on policy and public affairs relating to the international fight against AIDS. She earned a bachelor’s degree in politics from Catholic University of America.

“Congressional Visits Day will provide a valuable opportunity to interact with elected leaders and relate the importance of science and federal funding for research,” said Richards.

Richards is pursuing dual Master’s degrees in conservation biology and environmental policy at the University of Maryland. His research has taken him to Namibia to study the impacts of bush encroachment on rangeland. As part of his graduate work, he is developing guidance for the Namibian government to address invasive species. Richards has worked on wildlife conservation policy at a number of scientific and conservation-focused organizations, including the Society for Conservation Biology and the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. Richards has a bachelor’s degree in wildlife, fish and conservation biology from the University of California, Davis.

“This experience will give me the opportunity to communicate first hand with federal decision makers, not just on the facts of the present state of science, but the necessity of scientific research itself,” said Smith.

Smith is a Ph.D. candidate in biological oceanography at the University of Rhode Island. While interning for Rhode Island Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, she wrote a report on the effects of climate change on coastal ecosystems in Rhode Island. She later presented this information to government agencies, non-profit organizations, and local schools. For her graduate research, Smith is studying the environmental impacts of pollution on coastal waters. Her work could be used by state managers to better anticipate and prevent episodic events of poor water quality. Smith has participated in the NSF IGERT program. Her undergraduate degree in biology is from Davidson College in North Carolina.

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ABOUT AIBS

The American Institute of Biological Sciences is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) scientific association dedicated to advancing biological research and education for the welfare of society. Founded in 1947 as a part of the National Academy of Sciences, AIBS became an independent, member-governed organization in the 1950s. Today, headquartered in Washington, DC, with a staff of approximately 50, AIBS is sustained by a robust membership of some 5,000 biologists and nearly 200 professional societies and scientific organizations; the combined individual membership of the latter exceeds 250,000. AIBS advances its mission through participating in coalition activities in research, education, and public policy; publishing the peer-reviewed journal *BioScience* and the education Web site *ActionBioscience.org*; providing scientific peer-review and advisory services to government agencies and other clients; convening meetings; and managing scientific programs. Web site: www.aibs.org.

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