Director’s Message

Thank you for your interest in the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) public policy programs. This report summarizes the initiatives, services, and accomplishments of the AIBS Public Policy Office during 2014.

AIBS continues to advance the interests of the biological sciences community. As this report documents, we have been active in pushing for new funding for research and science education. These efforts contributed to Congress passing a fiscal year 2015 appropriations bill in December 2014. The legislation increased funding for many scientific programs.

Our past work with the scientific community to promote the importance of biodiversity collections for research, education, and informed decision-making resulted in the launch of several new national initiatives in 2014. In collaboration with the National Science Foundation, AIBS planned and launched a national innovation competition, Beyond the Box Digitization Competition, which will award $1 million to the individual or team who increase the speed and accuracy of the digitization of insect specimens and associated data.

We have also partnered with the Natural Science Collections Alliance, Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections, and iDigBio to foster the development of a sustainable, networked, national community dedicated to building a Network Integrated Biocollections Alliance.

In 2015 we will be organizing a workshop that brings together representatives from research communities ranging from genomics and phonemics to macro systems biology to explore common challenges and opportunities to data integration across fields.

The Public Policy Office continues to organize two annual events to help scientists develop the skills needed to effectively communicate with policymakers. The redesigned AIBS Legislative Action Center also enables
individuals to communicate with lawmakers and improve their efficacy as science advocates.

Once again, thank you for your interest in AIBS and our public policy initiatives. I hope you find the following pages informative and that you will consider how you or your scientific organization can join with us to advance biology.

Robert Gropp, Ph.D.
Director, Division of Community Programs and Public Policy Office
Key Accomplishments in 2014

√ Launched the Beyond the Box Digitization Competition with the National Science Foundation, which will award $1 million for the creation of a technology that increases the speed and accuracy of digitization of a drawer of insect specimens and their associated data.

√ Launched a national initiative to build a biocollections community that is able to fully implement the goals of the Network Integrated Biocollections Alliance.

√ Rallied the scientific community in support of sustained federal science funding.

√ Worked to improve legislation that would cut future funding for some areas of basic research and damage the peer review process at the National Science Foundation.

√ Testified before Congress on the importance of federal funding for the United States Geological Survey.

√ Facilitated more than one hundred meetings for scientists with federal and state lawmakers.

√ Organized two science policy briefings for Congress.


√ Trained scientists and students on how to effectively communicate with decision makers and the news media.

√ Collaborated with AIBS member organizations and other organizations to advance issues of concern to biologists and the wider scientific community.
Science Policy

The AIBS Public Policy Office made significant contributions to research and science education policy in 2014. Staff efforts were focused on sustaining federal investments in biological research and education, promoting the responsible use of science in the policymaking process, furthering the policy interests of natural science collections and other research infrastructure, and advancing science education and workforce policy.

Research Funding

The nation’s fiscal environment has remained challenging despite a congressional budget deal reached in December 2013 that lessened the impacts of budget sequestration. Given this policy environment, we worked aggressively to protect biological research and education programs from debilitating budget cuts and to push for increased funding.

The Public Policy Office met with congressional and agency policymakers and organized grassroots advocacy campaigns. We provided testimony to congressional appropriators in support of the National Science Foundation (NSF), U.S. Geological Survey, Environmental Protection Agency, and U.S. Forest Service. AIBS also worked within coalitions to send several letters to Congress in support of closing the innovation deficit.

These efforts were largely successful, with many federal science programs receiving increased funding or being spared deep budget cuts. As a result, research funding at NSF will increase by $125 million in fiscal year 2015.
**America COMPETES Reauthorization**

Congress continued to work on legislation to reauthorize the America COMPETES Act, a law that set funding goals and policy directives for the NSF and other federal science agencies. AIBS led an effort by biological societies to push for increased funding for all fields of basic research and fought against overly prescriptive policies that would interfere with the peer review process. AIBS also worked with a broad coalition of scientific organizations to improve a bill moving in the House of Representatives that would have cut future funding for some scientific disciplines and made damaging changes to the merit review process at NSF. Ultimately, neither the House nor Senate passed any relevant legislation before adjourning.

**Natural Science Collections**

Building upon a 2013 workshop and report, AIBS launched a national initiative to build a biocollections community that is able to fully implement and achieve the goals of the Network Integrated Biocollections Alliance. The initiative is in partnership with the Natural Science Collections Alliance, the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections, and iDigBio. A new website ([www.niballiance.org](http://www.niballiance.org)) is a forum for interested individuals to learn about and participate in community building activities that will help to cultivate a sustainable, networked, national community of practice to advance the interests of the biodiversity collections community.

AIBS policy staff continued to work closely with the Natural Science Collections Alliance to improve the state of the nation’s scientific collections. Among the activities AIBS policy staff performed in 2014 was the preparation of a document that demonstrates the value of natural history collections in informing wildlife management. We have also worked to help the Alliance to develop a new strategic plan.
**Evolution Education**

AIBS remains a leader in efforts to protect the integrity of science education from political campaigns seeking to undermine the science curriculum through the introduction of pseudoscientific concepts, such as creationism and intelligent design. In 2014, we spoke out in opposition to legislation in Oklahoma that would have weakened the teaching of evolution.

**Other Highlights**

The USGS Coalition, which AIBS chairs, awarded Senators Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Mark Udall (D-CO), and Dean Heller (R-NV) the 2014 USGS Coalition Leadership Award for their longstanding support for the scientific programs and personnel of the U.S. Geological Survey.

AIBS worked with other scientific organizations to alleviate overly restrictive regulations on federal employee travel, which have hindered the ability of federal researchers to attend scientific conferences.

The Association of Ecosystem Research Centers has worked with AIBS for many years to plan a Capitol Hill briefing in conjunction with their annual meeting. This year’s event highlighted the role of ecosystem research in the development of adaptation and mitigation strategies for climate change. AIBS public policy staff also trained ecosystem researchers to effectively communicate with journalists and policymakers as part of a half-day training workshop.

The Long Term Ecological Research Network worked with AIBS to host a briefing for policymakers on “Regional Data for Large Scale Environmental Issues.” The event highlighted how long-term observational and experimental data is improving our understanding of how ecosystems across the country are structured and function.
**Beyond the Box Digitization Competition**

With support from the National Science Foundation, AIBS launched the Beyond the Box Digitization Competition. The initiative will award $1 million to the individual or team who develops a novel way to accurately and efficiently capture digital images of insect specimens and their associated data from a standard museum drawer of insects.

For more than 250 years, scientists have collected millions of insects from around the world. These specimens are now held in more than one thousand natural science collections in universities and museums across the United States alone. Unfortunately, many of these specimens remain unknown to science, education, natural resource and public health managers, and the general public.

![Insect image](image)

 oficial contest rules and guidance are available at [beyondthebox.aibs.org](http://beyondthebox.aibs.org). The contest will close at 11:59 p.m. on September 4, 2015. A winner will be selected following a competitive judging process and on-site demonstration by the finalists.
Outreach and Training

**AIBS Legislative Action Center**

We redesigned and improved the AIBS Legislative Action Center. The new website offers enhanced tools and resources to help researchers engage in the development of the nation’s science policy. Website users can contact their elected officials, learn about current policy issues, and become a more effective advocate for science.

Grassroots activists use the AIBS Legislative Action Center to communicate with members of Congress, senior members of the executive branch, state lawmakers, and key media outlets in a timely and effective fashion. Topics addressed in letter writing campaigns in 2014 included defending peer review and federal funding for biological research and science education.

Additionally, the website offers summaries of current legislation of interest to the biological sciences community.

The Legislative Action Center is made possible by financial contributions from Society for the Study of Evolution, the Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography, and the Botanical Society of America.

**Policy and Media Training for Scientists**

The Public Policy Office offers policy and media training workshops for scientists. These programs have been received with enthusiasm by AIBS member organizations and university departments. In 2014, a training session was given for the Association of Ecosystem Research Centers. Interested organizations may purchase a program ranging from a one-hour plenary-style address to half- and full-day workshops. The extended programs include hands-on activities and a resource packet for each workshop participant.
**Grassroots Advocacy**

AIBS offers opportunities for scientists to meet with their federal and state elected officials in Washington, DC, or in their home state.

Dozens of biological researchers and educators participated in the 6th Annual Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits event. This national initiative encourages scientists across the nation to showcase for federal and state lawmakers the people, facilities, and equipment required to conduct scientific research. AIBS policy staff helped participants schedule and prepare for their meetings. The 6th Annual Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits were made possible by AIBS, with support from event sponsors Botanical Society of America, Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology, Natural Science Collections Alliance, Organization of Biological Field Stations, Society for the Study of Evolution, and Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology.

AIBS and the Ecological Society of America organized the 10th Biological and Ecological Science Coalition Congressional Visits Day. Thirty biologists from across the nation participated in the event, which included a half-day budget briefing and training program on science advocacy, and meetings with House and Senate offices about funding for biological research programs.

**Notable meetings facilitated by AIBS in 2014:**

- U.S. Representative Charlie Dent (R-PA) learned firsthand about an undergraduate research mentoring program at Moravian College.
- AIBS President Joe Travis and several graduate students met with U.S. Representative Spencer Bachus (R-AL) in his Capitol Hill office.
- The Cheadle Center for Biodiversity and Ecological Restoration at the University California, Santa Barbara hosted U.S. Representative Lois Capps (D-CA).
- U.S. Representative Dan Benishek (R-MI) toured the University of Michigan Biological Station.
- Tours of research facilities were arranged for two California state senators.
- Congressional staff toured the Otis L. Floyd Nursery Research Center at Tennessee State University, a new research facility at Harvard Medical School, and a natural history collection at Southeastern Louisiana University.
**Emerging Public Policy Leadership Award**

The Public Policy Office administers the prestigious AIBS Emerging Public Policy Leadership Award program. The award identifies graduate students in the biological sciences who show great promise to work at the interface of science and public policy. In 2014, the award was presented to Andrew Adrian, a Ph.D. student in biology at the University of Iowa, and Amalia Aruda Almada, a Ph.D. candidate in biological oceanography at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. They each received an expenses-paid trip to Washington, DC, to participate in meetings with their congressional delegation, training and information on the federal budget and appropriations process, a one-year AIBS membership, a complimentary one-year subscription to *BioScience*, and a copy of *Communicating Science: A Primer for Working with the Media*.

**Internships**

In 2014, policy staff mentored three interns: a Master’s student at Arizona State University, a high school student, and a graduate student working towards an M.S. at West Virginia University. These opportunities provide students with an introduction to the processes through which Congress, the White House, federal agencies, and the scientific community work to develop the nation’s science policy. Past interns have returned to graduate school, secured other policy fellowships, or are employed at the interface of science and policy.
Publications and Information Dissemination

In 2014, AIBS marked the fifteenth anniversary of the bi-weekly *AIBS Public Policy Report*. This widely read online publication provides original news and analysis of timely science policy discussions and alerts scientists to opportunities for grassroots action.

The Washington Watch column in the AIBS journal *BioScience* addressed several timely policy issues of interest to the biological sciences community in 2014, including government actions on climate adaptation and legislation to reauthorize the National Science Foundation.

Press Relations

In 2014, several AIBS initiatives were reported on by the news media. The Public Policy Office provides press relations support to AIBS, as well as guidance and assistance to AIBS member societies and organizations that contribute funding to the Office or that purchase services on a fee-for-service basis. Policy staff members provide reporters with background information to help them prepare accurate science or science policy news reports and also grant interviews on topics including federal research policy, education and workforce policy, and the politicization of science.

Photo Contest

This was the fourth year of the AIBS sponsored Faces of Biology Photo Contest. The contest encourages researchers, educators, and students to showcase the varied forms that biological research can take. The photos are used to help the public and policymakers better understand the value of biology.
Get Involved

If you have a minute…

- Join the AIBS Legislative Action Center (policy.aibs.org)
- Subscribe to the Public Policy Report (www.aibs.org/public-policy-reports)
- Follow us on Twitter (@AIBS_policy)

If you have 15 minutes…

- Read an AIBS position statement (www.aibs.org/position-statements)
- Delve into science policy by reading a Washington Watch column from BioScience (www.aibs.org/washington-watch)
- Learn about federal investments in science and the budget process (www.aibs.org/public-policy/science_funding.html)

If you have a day…

- Participate in the BESC Congressional Visits Day in Washington, DC (www.aibs.org/public-policy/congressional_visits_day.html)
- Participate in the Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits event (www.aibs.org/public-policy/congressional_district_visits.html)
- Coordinate a media and policy training workshop (www.aibs.org/public-policy/policy_training.html)

Student Opportunities

- Apply for the Emerging Public Policy Leadership Award (www.aibs.org/public-policy/student_opportunities.html)
- Intern at the AIBS Public Policy Office (www.aibs.org/public-policy/student_opportunities.html)
Contributing Societies

Partner

Natural Science Collections Alliance

Collaborator

Society for the Study of Evolution

Participant

American Ornithologists’ Union
American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists
Association of Ecosystem Research Centers
Botanical Society of America
Long Term Ecological Research Network
Organization of Biological Field Stations
Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology
Society of Systematic Biologists
Society of Wetland Scientists

Supporter

American Arachnological Society
Mycological Society of America
Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry—North America

The Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography contributes targeted funding to help sponsor the Legislative Action Center.

The American Society of Mammologists contributes targeted funding to support student training initiatives.

How to Contribute

Financial support from individuals and organizations makes it possible for AIBS to serve the biological sciences community and to help advance a common agenda. Consider making a contribution to AIBS. Please visit https://aibs.sitelym.com/?donations to make a secure online donation.
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AIBS Public Policy Office Staff
Robert Gropp, Director
Julie Palakovich Carr, Public Policy Manager

Photos: Julie Palakovich Carr, Brittany Barker, Jim Inman, Daniel Le, and Molly Steinwald
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. AIBS works to ensure that the public, legislators, funders, and the community of biologists have access to and use information that will guide them in making informed decisions about matters that require biological knowledge. The organization does this through informing decisions by providing peer-reviewed or vetted information about the biology field and profession and by catalyzing action through building the capacity and the leadership of the community to address matters of common concern.

Founded in 1947 as a part of the National Academy of Sciences, AIBS became an independent, member-governed organization in the 1950s. Today, AIBS has 140 member organizations and is headquartered in Reston, VA, with a Public Policy Office in Washington, DC. Our employees work to achieve our mission by publishing the peer-reviewed journal *BioScience* and the education website *ActionBioscience.org*, by providing scientific peer-review and advisory services to government agencies and other clients, and by collaborating with scientific organizations to advance public policy, education, and the public understanding of science.

Support AIBS by making a contribution at https://aibs.site-ym.com/donations/.