American Institute of Biological Sciences

2011 Public Policy Office Annual Report
Director’s Message

Thank you for your interest in the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) Public Policy Office (PPO). This report provides a brief summary of our programs, services, and accomplishments from 2011.

I am pleased to report that despite a daunting political and policy environment in 2011, the AIBS Public Policy Office continued to aggressively and successfully advance the interests of the biological sciences community. We helped reverse a Senate proposal that would have cut funding for research at the National Science Foundation (NSF). Through a wide-spread grassroots campaign, we made a strong case for scientific research that ultimately helped science advocates in Congress secure a $173 million increase for NSF. We also communicated the importance of federal investments in scientific research to the bipartisan, bicameral budget deficit reduction committee (i.e. the Super Committee).

Beyond funding, we provided recommendations on various policy topics to federal agencies. Of note, many of our suggestions on draft agency scientific integrity policies were incorporated in the final policies.

The Public Policy Office also continued to help scientists develop the skills needed to effectively communicate with decision-makers and the news media. Additionally, the AIBS Legislative Action Center enabled individuals to communicate with the President, members of Congress, and various news media outlets.

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, Public Policy Office

Public Policy Office
Mission

1. Reduce the communication gap that exists between the science and public policy communities;

2. Build the capacity of the biological sciences community to successfully engage in the public policy process;

3. Influence the development and implementation of science policy;

4. Assist AIBS member societies and organizations with the development of their public policy agendas;

5. Communicate AIBS and member society/organization policy interests to the public, science community, and policymakers.
Key Accomplishments

√ Helped to secure $173 million in new funding for the National Science Foundation.
√ Defended peer review and social science research from political attacks.
√ Influenced the development of sound scientific integrity policies at the National Science Foundation, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and Environmental Protection Agency.
√ Organized a petition signed by 2,900 students on the importance of federal investments in scientific research and education programs.
√ Worked to reduce the magnitude of spending cuts for federal biological, environmental, and climate research programs.
√ Helped secure the right of federal scientists to fully participate in scientific professional societies.
√ Facilitated participation of scientists with Congressional policymakers in Washington, DC through BESC’s Congressional Visits Day, and around the nation through the 3rd Annual Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits event.
√ Trained scientists and students on how to effectively communicate with decision-makers and the news media.
√ Generated more than 5,200 letters from scientists to members of Congress and the President about biological research and education.
√ Co-chaired two national science policy coalitions: the USGS Coalition and the Biological and Ecological Sciences Coalition. Participated in the Coalition for National Science Funding, the Climate Science Working Group, and the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Education Coalition.
√ Organized three science policy briefings on Capitol Hill for decision-makers.
Science Policy

The AIBS Public Policy Office made significant contributions to science and science education policy in 2011. Staff efforts were concentrated on sustaining federal investments in biological research and education, promoting responsible use of science in the policymaking process, furthering the policy interests of natural science collections, and advancing science education and workforce policy.

Research Funding

Given the national political and policy emphasis on deficit reduction, we worked aggressively to protect biological research and education programs from debilitating budget cuts. The Public Policy Office met with policymakers, organized grassroots advocacy campaigns, provided testimony to Congressional appropriators, and provided recommendations to the deficit reduction ‘Super Committee.’ These efforts were successful in increasing the fiscal year 2012 budget for the National Science Foundation (NSF), and in lessening the amount of proposed budget cuts for some biological and environmental programs for fiscal year 2012.

The Public Policy Office also met with Dr. John Wingfield, the new Assistant Director of NSF’s Directorate for Biological Sciences (BIO), and the BIO Advisory Council. These meetings provided an opportunity for AIBS to share with NSF some of the concerns and recommendations we have received from the research community during the past year.

“As future scientists and educators, we, the undersigned students, encourage Congress and the President to make sustained investments in the nation’s scientific research, education, and training programs.”

--Excerpt from an open letter to federal policymakers signed by 2,900+ undergraduate and graduate students. The letter was a collaboration between AIBS and graduate student representatives of the Botanical Society of America.

Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) accepts the 2011 USGS Coalition Leadership Award. AIBS chairs the coalition.
**Scientific Integrity**

Throughout 2011, federal agencies worked to develop scientific integrity policies in response to a 2009 Executive Order from President Obama. AIBS was a vocal advocate for scientific integrity in federal departments and agencies, and provided recommendations to NSF, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Several recommendations offered by AIBS were incorporated into NOAA's and NSF's final policies. Furthermore, the scientific integrity policy released by the Department of the Interior early in 2011 included a number of the recommendations AIBS offered to Interior in 2010.

One issue of importance is the ability of agency scientists to participate in and lead scientific and professional societies. AIBS was among the scientific organizations that pushed for the finalization of a rule on this topic by the Office of Government Ethics. That rule allows federal employees to serve on the board of directors of a non-profit organization, including a scientific organization, in their official capacity as a government representative. AIBS also worked with federal agencies to ensure that the rule was properly included in agency scientific integrity policies.

**Natural Science Collections**

AIBS policy staff members continued to work closely with the Natural Science Collections Alliance (NSC Alliance) to improve the state of the nation’s scientific collections. In 2011, the groups began to develop a proposal for legislation that could help to preserve, modernize, and improve access to the nation’s science collections.

**Peer Review**

The peer review system came under attack from some members of Congress in 2011. In some instances, the criticisms appeared to be linked to opposition to federal support for the social sciences, including research on public perception of climate change, use of social media, and attitudes about politics. AIBS joined other scientific organizations to defend peer review and social sciences from such political attacks. The Public Policy Office also offered recommendations to NSF as the agency worked to review and change the merit review criteria used during the peer review process.
Evolution Education

AIBS remained 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/intelligent design. The Public Policy Office maintains a collaborative relationship with the National Center for Science Education (NCSE), and provides interested scientists and educators with information about science education policy developments via the AIBS/NCSE evolution communication network and the AIBS Public Policy Report. When necessary, AIBS also works with state policymakers and media outlets to nullify threats to quality science education. For example, AIBS wrote to the Louisiana state legislature in support of a grassroots effort to repeal the Louisiana Science Education Act, the state’s anti-evolution education law.

Science Policy Briefings

In 2011, the Public Policy Office helped to organize three briefings for policymakers on Capitol Hill. For the first time, AIBS member society Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation partnered with AIBS to organize a briefing entitled “Gulf of Mexico Ecosystems One Year After the Deepwater Horizon.” The Association of Ecosystem Research Centers has worked with AIBS for many years to plan a Capitol Hill briefing in conjunction with their annual symposium. This year’s event highlighted the value of ecosystem services. The third briefing was presented by a group of researchers who published an article in the April 2011 issue of BioScience that identified priorities for research on management and conservation of natural resources. All three briefings were well attended by staff from Congressional offices, federal agencies, and non-governmental organizations.
Outreach and Training

**AIBS Legislative Action Center**

The Legislative Action Center is an online advocacy tool that enables individuals to communicate with members of Congress, senior members of the executive branch, and key media outlets in a timely and effective fashion. The website allows individuals to quickly send a letter prepared by AIBS staff to policymakers or to craft and send their own letter.

Use of the Legislative Action Center has grown at an impressive rate. In 2011, scientists and science educators used the Legislative Action Center to send more than 5,200 letters to members of Congress and the President about biological research and education.

This exciting advocacy tool is made possible by financial contributions from the Society for the Study of Evolution, American Society for Limnology and Oceanography, Association of Ecosystem Research Centers, and Botanical Society of America.

**Policy & 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. Interested organizations may purchase a program ranging from a 1-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 continued to offer opportunities for scientists to meet with their members of Congress in Washington, DC or in their home state.

In August, the Public Policy Office organized the 3rd Annual Biological Sciences Congressional District Visits event. This initiative is a national effort to encourage scientists to meet with their members of Congress in their home state. AIBS policy staff helped participants schedule and prepare for meetings.

AIBS also helped organize the 7th Biological and Ecological Science Coalition (BESC) Congressional Visits Day. Biologists from across the nation participated in the event, which included a half-day budget briefing and advocacy training program, and meetings with House and Senate offices about funding for biological research programs.
Publications & Information Dissemination

Last year marked the twelfth 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 issues requiring grassroots action (e.g. threats to evolution education or proposed cuts to federal research programs).

In 2011, the Washington Watch column in the AIBS journal BioScience addressed several timely policy issues of interest to the biological sciences community, including policy issues in the emerging area of synthetic biology and climate change science. The director of the Public Policy Office serves as the editor of the Washington Watch column.

The Public Policy Office also launched a Twitter account, AIBS_policy, as a mechanism to rapidly alert interested individuals to developing policy issues and opportunities to engage in the policy process.

AIBS continued to sell the publication Communicating Science: A Primer for Working with the Media. The book, written by Holly Menninger and Robert Gropp, contains practical tips and techniques for successful interactions with the news media. It is available for purchase from the AIBS bookstore at http://webstore.aibs.org/.

Press Relations

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. Policy staff provide reporters with background information to help them prepare accurate science or science policy news reports, and also grant interviews on topics ranging from federal research policy to education and workforce policy to politicization of science. In 2011, we were successful in getting several stories picked up by media outlets.

2011 AIBS Public Policy Office Annual Report
Emerging Public Policy Leadership Award

The Public Policy Office administers the prestigious AIBS Emerging Public Policy Leadership Award (EPPLA) program. The EPPLA competition identifies graduate students in the biological sciences who show great promise to work at the interface of science and public policy. In 2011, the award was presented to Wesley Brooks, who is pursuing a Ph.D. in ecology and evolutionary biology at Rutgers University. He received an expense-paid trip to Washington, DC to participate in meetings with his 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.

2011 EPPLA winner Wesley Brooks with AIBS Public Policy Director Robert Gropp.

Internships

The Public Policy Office offers paid and unpaid internship opportunities to undergraduate and graduate biology students. In 2011, policy staff mentored two interns: a Master’s student sponsored by the American Society of Mammalogists and a high school student. 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.
Get Involved

If you have 5 minutes…

• Join the AIBS Legislative Action Center (www.capwiz.com/aibs/mlm/signup)
• 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 on research funding, scientific integrity, climate change, and more (www.aibs.org/position-statements)
• Delve into science policy by reading a Washington Watch column from BioScience (www.aibs.org/washington-watch)

If you have 30 minutes…

• Learn about federal investments in science and the budget process (www.aibs.org/public-policy/science_funding.html)
• Find out the latest developments regarding evolution education in the states (www.aibs.org/public-policy/teaching_evolution.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)
AIBS Public Policy Committee

Chair
Joel Cracraft, American Ornithologists’ Union

Committee Members
Ian Billick, Organization of Biological Field Stations
Janet Carlson, Biological Sciences Curriculum Study
Keith Crandall, Society of Systematic Biologists
Robert J. Diaz, Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation
Kent E. Holsinger, Botanical Society of America
Society for the Study of Evolution
John Lundberg, American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists
David E. Smith, Association of Ecosystem Research Centers
Jake Socha, Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology
Robert B. Waide, Long Term Ecological Research Network Office
Dennis F. Whigham, Society of Wetland Scientists

AIBS Public Policy Office Staff
Robert Gropp, Director
Julie Palakovich Carr, Senior Public Policy Associate

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
Biological Sciences Curriculum Study
Botanical Society of America
Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation
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
International Society of Protistologists—North America
Mycological Society of America
Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry—North America

The American Society for Limnology and Oceanography contributes targeted funding to help sponsor the Legislative Action Center.

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 biology-informed public policy. Consider donating to AIBS: visit www.aibs.org/donate/ or contact AIBS Executive Director Richard O’Grady at 202-628-1500.
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.

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 nearly 160 member organizations and is headquartered in Reston, VA, with a Public Policy Office in Washington, DC. Its approximately 40 staff members work to achieve its mission by publishing the peer-reviewed journal *BioScience* and the education Web site 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.