



Science Policy News

Entomological Society of America Science Policy News

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ESA IN DC

ESA President Susan Weller Presents at NAS Forum on GE Crops

ESA President Susan Weller was invited to participate in and present at a National Academy of Sciences Forum held on December 7 in Washington, DC. The event, *Forum of Scientific Society Leaders on Genetically Engineered Crops: Experiences and Prospects*, was hosted by the Board on Agriculture and Natural Resources. The forum provided an opportunity to discuss both the motivation for several recent studies—to bring greater clarity to the often conflicting and confusing messaging to the public around the safety of genetically engineered food and agriculture—as well as future challenges and opportunities in this space.

The event included a presentation of findings from the recent reports *Human Health Effects of GE Crops*; *Social and Economic Effects of GE Crops*; *Agronomic and Environmental Effects of GE Crops*; *Where is Genetic Engineering Going? The Promise of Next Generation Biotechnology*; and *Genetically Engineered Crops: Experiences and Prospects*. The reports, slides from some of presentations, and some webcast material are available online.

Sources and Additional Information:

- The agenda for the forum is available at <http://dels.nas.edu/Upcoming-Event/Forum-Scientific-Society-Leaders/AUTO-5-80-52-G?bname=banr>.
- The full NAS report *Genetically Engineered Crops: Experiences and Prospects* is available at <http://nas-sites.org/ge-crops/>.
- The webcast content and slides are available at <http://nas-sites.org/ge-crops/2016/04/27/report-release/>.

ESA President Susan Weller Meets with Congress and Federal Agencies

ESA President Susan Weller met with Congressional members as well as representatives from federal agencies during meetings in Washington, DC, on December 6. On Capitol Hill, in her role as ESA President as well as Director of the University of Nebraska State Museum, Weller met with Sen. Deb Fischer (R-NE) as well as staff from the offices of Sen. Ben Sasse (R-NE) and Rep. Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE).

In addition to meeting with the Nebraska delegation, she met with staff from the office of Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI) to share a letter of support from ESA on behalf of legislation the senator introduced to reauthorize the *Museum and Library Services Act of 2016* (S.3391). This bill reauthorizes the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), which is the main source of federal support for libraries and museums within the United States.

Off the Hill, Weller met with Sonny Ramaswamy, the director of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). An entomologist himself, Ramaswamy shared advice regarding effective communication strategies on Capitol Hill and with the incoming White House administration. Weller also met with representatives from the USDA Forest Health Protection program and Jim Olds, assistant director of the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Directorate for Biological Sciences (BIO), who talked about the new Rules of Life, part of the "10 Big Ideas for Future NSF Investments."

Sources and Additional Information:

- The letter of support from ESA on behalf of the Museum and Library Services Act is available at <http://entsoc.org/sites/default/files/files/Entomological-Society-America-Endorses-Museum-and-Library-Services-Act-of-2016-Letter.pdf>.
- Information on the *Museum and Library Services Act of 2016* (S.3391) is available at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/3391>.
- Information on the 10 Big Ideas for Future NSF Investments is available at https://www.nsf.gov/about/congress/reports/nsf_big_ideas.pdf.

ESA Co-Signs Letter to Trump Emphasizing Value of Scientific Research and Education

ESA joined 62 other scientific organizations to send a letter to President-Elect Donald Trump and his transition team to advocate for the new administration to make scientific research a budgetary priority, appoint a Presidential Science Advisor with strong scientific credentials, and direct his new administration to use peer-reviewed scientific information to inform decisions. The letter was [organized by the American Institute of Biological Sciences](#) and delivered to the Trump transition team in late December 2016.

Sources and Additional Information:

- The letter, titled "The Role of Science in the Trump Administration," is available at <http://entsoc.org/sites/default/files/files/AIBS-Trump-Transition-Letter.pdf>.

CONGRESSIONAL UPDATES AND NEWS

Congress Passes Continuing Resolution to Fund the Government through April 28, 2017

On December 9, Congress passed a continuing resolution (CR) to fund government operations through April 28, 2017. The bill passed with bipartisan support, with a Senate vote of 63-36 and a House vote of 326-96. The first CR of fiscal year (FY) 2017 funded government operations through December 9, and with only one hour to spare, this second CR avoided a government shutdown. The CR maintains a budget cap level of \$1.07 trillion, consistent with the spending limit negotiated for FY 2017 in last year's bipartisan budget deal, the *Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015*.

The CR funds most federal agencies and associated programs and projects at FY 2016 levels. However, recognizing the significant impact to federal programs of operating government funding under a CR for at least seven out of the 12 months of the fiscal year, Congress approved certain spending increases, known as anomalies, that reflect congressional

priorities, such as:

- \$872 million to boost medical research and drug approval efforts and respond to the opioid abuse crisis identified in the *21st Century Cures Act of 2016*, including \$352 million for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Innovation Account for the "Cancer Moonshot," regenerative medicine, and the Precision Medicine and BRAIN Initiatives, \$500 million for opioid addiction treatment and prevention grant programs, and \$20 million for the Food and Drug Administration Innovation Account to expedite drug and medical device review and approvals;
- \$10 billion in additional funds for the Overseas Contingency Operations fund to support military and diplomatic efforts to fight ISIS, counter-terrorism and ongoing peacekeeping operations, migration and refugee assistance, and embassy security, construction, and maintenance, with \$5.8 billion for the Department of Defense and \$4.3 billion for the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development;
- \$4.1 billion in disaster relief to repair the damage from Hurricane Matthew (including \$75 million for NASA), floods, droughts, and other natural disasters;
- \$170 million to help repair the lead-contaminated water system of Flint, Michigan; and
- \$45 million for continued health care benefits for certain retired miners under the United Mine Workers Association 1993 Benefit Plan.

In addition to spending increases, the CR also gives certain federal agencies the authority and flexibility to spend funds above FY 2016 levels for specific projects, as long as the federal agency finds a funding offset, such as:

- increased funding to maintain the planned launch schedules for NASA's Deep Space Exploration program, including the Space Launch System launch vehicle, Exploration Ground Systems, and the Orion Multi-Purpose Crew Vehicle program;
- additional funding for the Joint Polar Satellite System program for better forecasts of severe weather events; and
- flexibility to move funding in the National Nuclear Security Administration's Weapons Activity Account to support the highest priority and highest need nuclear weapons modernization activities.

Congress has until April 28, 2017, to pass the remaining 11 appropriations bills (the bill funding the Department of Veterans Affairs and military construction projects for the entirety of FY 2017 passed in the last CR), pass another CR, or pass an omnibus bill—a large catch-all spending bill for the remaining five months of FY 2017. Given the need to review the FY 2018 budget request, a busy Senate schedule to confirm President-elect Trump's Cabinet nominees, and a debate over the federal debt limit, which must be raised by March 16, 2017, the most likely outcome will be a CR to fund the remainder of the fiscal year from April through the end of September, which will maintain most federal programs and activities at FY 2016 levels, but may include additional funding provisions and anomalies for the highest priority congressional activities.

Sources and Additional Information:

- The full text of the CR is available at <http://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20161205/CPRT-114-HPRT-RU00-SAHR2028.pdf>.
- A House Appropriations Committee summary of the CR is available at <http://appropriations.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=394665>.

FEDERAL AGENCY AND ADMINISTRATION UPDATES AND NEWS

Trump Announces EPA Nominee

Late last month, the Trump administration announced that Scott Pruitt, attorney general of Oklahoma, would be the president-elect's nominee to lead the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). In his role as Oklahoma AG, Pruitt is currently involved in a lawsuit against the Obama Administration Clean Power Plan, EPA regulations to limit greenhouse gas emissions from power plants.

While it's likely that a Trump administration EPA, under the direction of Pruitt, will likely shift to de-regulation of environmental policies, the impact on pesticide labeling and related issues remains uncertain.

Pruitt's nomination preceded the announcement of President-Elect Trump's nomination of Exxon Mobile CEO Rex Tillerson as Secretary of State. All cabinet nominees and political appointees require confirmation by relevant Senate subcommittees that have jurisdiction over the position and then approval by the full Senate. Under current Senate rules, a simple majority (51 votes) is required to confirm judicial and administration nominees (except for the Supreme Court). Republicans currently hold 52 seats in the chamber.

Obama Announces Executive Order on Invasive Species

On December 5, the Obama administration issued an executive order directing coordinated efforts across all federal agencies to eradicate and prevent further establishment of harmful invasive species. *Safeguarding the Nation from the Impacts of Invasive Species* calls on federal agencies to actively utilize available resources, within reason, to mitigate the economic, environmental, and human health effects of invasive populations.

The executive order specifically notes the growing concern surrounding vector-borne disease and the difficulty in containing the spread of disease vectors, which is exacerbated by significant climate shifts. Federal agencies are encouraged to work with the National Invasive Species Advisory Council as well as other agencies to establish a set of metrics and best practices for monitoring invasive populations. The order outlines nine objectives for the agencies to consider as they move forward with their efforts, which include the restoration of ecosystems that have already been negatively affected. If these efforts continue into the next administration, it would be an opportunity for ESA to engage with federal agencies and demonstrate the value of the Society in advancing key federal priorities.

Sources and Additional Information:

- The full executive order is available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/12/05/executive-order-safeguarding-nation-impacts-invasive-species>.

OSTP Releases Report on Strategies for Reducing Zika Transmission

In December, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) released a comprehensive strategy to address the public health effects stemming from vector-borne disease, specifically those spread by *Aedes* mosquitoes. *A Strategy for Integrating Best Practices with New Science to Prevent Disease Transmission by Aedes Mosquito Vectors* expands upon the activities supported by the *Zika Response and Preparedness Act* and identifies five additional domains with opportunity for significant growth. Agencies and scientific organizations are directed to engage with the Task Force on Science and Technology for Zika Vector Control, chartered following the initial emergence of Zika in the United States, to coordinate mitigation, eradication, and education efforts.

The report was co-authored by Bruce Rodan, assistant director for environmental health for OSTP, who met with the ESA Science Policy Fellows during their most recent trip to Washington, DC, and was very receptive to the idea of future engagement with ESA. The Society is mentioned by name in the report as a necessary resource in the training of future entomologists and field technicians to implement "integrated-vector-management strategies" and will be prepared to respond should this initiative continue into the next administration. Moving forward, ESA will look to engage with the Task Force on Zika Control as well as the American Mosquito Control Association, named in the report as a workforce development and education resource, to maximize the utilization of ESA's expertise in the field.

Sources and Additional Information:

- A summary of the report is available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2016/12/14/vector-control-science-and-technology-manage-zika>.
- The full report is available at www.whitehouse.gov as well.

HHS Awards \$40 Million in Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and U.S. Virgin Islands to Fight Zika

On December 8, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced approximately \$40 million in funding over three years for 23 health centers in Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the U.S. Virgin Islands to combat the spread of Zika virus. An additional \$1 million will be distributed to two primary care associations to provide training, technical, and activity implementation assistance to medical centers treating patients affected by Zika. While HHS has provided more than \$560 million in funding over the past year to federal agencies combatting Zika, U.S. territories have been disproportionately affected by the virus, with 33,133 reported cases as opposed to 4,496 in the continental U.S., and they are inadequately prepared to provide quality health care to those in need. While there is still much work to be done, the HHS hopes that these additional awards will increase the quality of care and the availability of resources to those in need of treatment.

Sources and Additional Information:

- The press release announcing these awards is available at <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2016/12/08/hhs-awards-40-million-in-puerto-rico-american-samoa-and-the-us-virgin-islands-to-fight-zika.html>.

USDA NIFA Announces \$4 Million in Funding for Biotechnology Risk Assessment Research

On December 12, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) announced \$4 million in funding for Biotechnology Risk Assessment Research Grants (BRAG) to investigate the broader environmental consequences of using genetically engineered (GE) organisms. This solicitation aims to investigate these consequences and inform the public and legislators about the potential health and environmental effects of GE organisms.

Research proposals under this solicitation should address one of the five following categories:

- management practices to minimize environmental risk of GE organisms
- methods to monitor and understand the dispersal of GE organisms
- gene transfer to domesticated and wild relatives
- environmental impacts of GE in the context of production systems
- other research topics that will further the purposes of the program

Eligible applicants include a range of research and academic institutions, and interested parties should consider how their proposal will help regulators and policy makers make informed decisions about the effects of the growing field and "examine critical topics on biotechnology and risk assessment." Letters of intent are due by **January 26, 2017**, with full proposals due **March 30, 2017**.

Sources and Additional Information:

- The full solicitation for this program is available at <https://nifa.usda.gov/announcement/nifa-announces-4-million-funding-biotechnology-risk-assessment-research>.



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