AIBS Seeks Endorsements of IBRCS White Paper on NEON
With the National Research Council study of the National Ecological Observatory Network (NEON) under way (see www.nationalacademies.org/neon) and the National Science Foundation’s FY2004 budget request for NEON in the process of being considered for approval on Capitol Hill, now is a pivotal time for professional scientific societies and organizations who support NEON and want to be a part of its creation to make a public demonstration of their support. One way to do this is to formally endorse the March 2003 Infrastructure for Biology at Regional to Continental Scales (IBRCS) white paper, Rationale, Blueprint, and Expectations for the National Ecological Observatory Network, written by the IBRCS working group of scientists drawn from a broad range of expertise and disciplines within the AIBS membership and beyond.

Broad-based endorsement of the white paper will make its recommendations on NEON more useful to scientists and decisionmakers alike and will help future collaborative actions related to NEON. Please view the white paper online at http://ibr.cs.aibs.org or contact Jeffrey Goldman, IBRCS project manager, for a hard copy at jgoldman@aibs.org. Then contact Jeffrey Goldman or Richard O’Grady at rogrady@aibs.org if your society or organization is willing to formally endorse the white paper.

AIBS Submits Comments on Priorities for Infrastructure Projects at NSF to National Academies Committee
In response to a congressional request, the National Academies Committee on Setting Priorities for NSF-sponsored Large Research Facility Projects (hosted by the Board on Physics and Astronomy) is examining how the National Science Foundation (NSF) sets priorities among multiple competing proposals for construction and operation of large-scale research facility projects for a diverse array of disciplines. The committee will make recommendations on how to make the priority-setting process as effective as possible, taking into account NSF’s significant role in funding academic research in science and engineering in the United States.

The committee’s first meeting was held on 19–20 May 2003 at the National Academies’ Keck Center in Washington, DC. The first day of the meeting was divided into three panels. The first panel consisted of representatives from the House Science Committee and the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Veterans’ Affairs, Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies (which requested the study).

During the congressional panel, representatives noted that NSF is among the most “transparent” of all agencies in regard to how it sets its annual budget. Panelists expressed concern, however, that there is little transparency or apparent coordination in the priority-setting process when it comes to large infrastructure projects, especially those funded through the Major Research Equipment and Facilities Construction (MREFC) account. Panelists noted that choosing between the scientific disciplines is extremely difficult, but they are hoping to leave that choice up to NSF and the National Science Board rather than leaving the account open to lobbyists. NSF Director Rita Colwell and Deputy Director Joseph Bordogna followed the congressional panel and outlined the process NSF currently uses to prioritize projects. A panel of scientists from various disciplines closed the day, presenting an overview of MREFC projects in their fields.

At one point, a congressional representative noted that one of the factors driving the request for the study was a sense that the biological sciences had received undue favor in the account. During the public comment period on the second day, AIBS sought to correct this perception by noting that the biological sciences have yet to receive any funding through the MREFC account in its 8 years of existence. The National Ecological Observatory Network (NEON) is the first such project for biology. Congress declined funding the project the first 2 years it was in the budget; it is unclear at this stage in the budget process whether it will receive funding this year.

Further information, including electronic and videotaped copies of presentations made to the committee, is available at www7.nationalacademies.org/nsf-priorities/. The committee’s next scheduled meetings are 21–22 July (at the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center, Menlo Park, CA), 17–18 September, and 5–6 November 2003.

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NRC Requests Help Identifying Subfields in the Life Sciences

As regular readers of the AIBS Public Policy Report are aware, the National Research Council (NRC) is examining the methodology for assessment of research-doctorate programs. As part of this effort, NRC is developing a taxonomy of academic disciplines and fields. The four disciplines in the taxonomy are Life Sciences; Humanities; Physical Sciences, Mathematics, and Engineering; and Social and Behavioral Sciences.

On the basis of comments NRC received from biologists earlier this year, the taxonomy of the life sciences has been modified and organized to include 16 categories representing fields of study in the life sciences. (Bioengineering, biomedical engineering, and oceanography are included under the physical science category.) NRC is now requesting suggestions for the inclusion of “subfields.” Subfields will be used during the full study to “assist faculty in associating with a field in the taxonomy” and to “assure that program raters are spread fairly evenly across subfields when programs are assessed.”

The current draft taxonomy is available at www7.nationalacademies.org/resdoc/Draft_Taxonomy.html. Contact: resdoc@nas.edu.

Wanted: AIBS/NCSE State Evolution List Server Managers

The AIBS/NCSE (National Center for Science Education) Evolution List Server Network in the United States and Canada allows scientists, teachers, and other parties interested in evolution education to be in touch with each other locally, nationally, and internationally. State and territory list servers facilitate support groups for educators trying to teach evolution in a difficult atmosphere; permit rapid communication and grassroots activity when school boards or legislatures are considering policies that will promote the teaching of antievolutionary ideas in science classes; and provide information about evolution-related activities (for example, seminars and public or church meetings) in a state, territory, or local community.

Volunteers willing and able to manage list servers are needed for the following states: Alaska, Connecticut (manager needs a server host), Delaware, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Oregon, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, and North Dakota. In Canada, list server managers are needed for all provinces except Alberta and Ontario.

If you are interested in managing a list server for your state or province or for a neighboring state, or if you know someone who would be interested, please contact Dr. Robert Gropp, AIBS Senior Policy Representative, at rgropp@aibs.org. Information about the AIBS/NCSE Evolution List Server Network may be found at www.aibs.org/evolution/index.html.

AIBS 2004 Annual Meeting Dates and Theme Announced; Council Meeting Date Set

The AIBS 2004 annual meeting will be held in Washington, DC, beginning at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, 16 March, and ending at noon on Thursday, 18 March. The theme of the meeting is “Invasive Species: A Search for Solutions.” The meeting will include plenary sessions, panels, informal discussion groups, and posters. In a reversal of the sequence from previous years, the meeting of the AIBS Council of member societies and organizations will be held immediately before the annual meeting, in the same location, from 7 p.m. on Monday, 15 March, through 5 p.m. on Tuesday, 16 March. Please watch the AIBS Web site or contact Richard O’Grady at rogrady@aibs.org for additional information.
Slate of Candidates for 2003 AIBS Board Elections Approved

The AIBS Board of Directors has approved the following slate of candidates for the 2003 board elections. All terms begin in January 2004. Ballots will be sent to the AIBS membership in the early fall of 2003.

Candidates for president-elect (one seat to fill):
- Paula Mabee, University of South Dakota
- Marvalee Wake, University of California–Berkeley

Candidates for board, from AIBS Council (one seat to fill):
- Patricia Gensel, University of North Carolina
- Michael Scott, University of Idaho

Candidates for board, from membership (one seat to fill):
- Mary Arthur, University of Kentucky
- Arturo Gómez-Pompa, University of California–Riverside

Candidates for treasurer (one seat to fill):
- Richard Norgaard, University of California–Berkeley
- Louis Pitelka, University of Maryland

Recent Public Policy Reports Online at www.aibs.org

Public Policy Report for 9 June 2003
- National Science Board requests comments on education and workforce report
- Pew Oceans Commission final report calls for doubling of ocean science research budget
- ACTION ALERT: Creationists threaten Louisiana public education, again
- College loan rates drop to historic low
- State science education profiles available

Public Policy Report for 27 May 2003
- AIBS submits comments on prioritizing infrastructure projects at NSF to NAS committee
- NAS releases report on EPA STAR fellowship program
- NAS Committee on NEON meeting 10 June, solicits input from biologists
- NRC requests help identifying subfields in the life sciences
- Sustainable Rangelands Roundtable issues report
- WANTED: AIBS/NCSE state evolution list server managers

AIBSnews compiled and reported by Donna Royston (e-mail: droyston@aibs.org).