

## Report on activities of the American Institute of Biological Sciences

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In addition to approximately 5000 individual members, the American Institute of Biological Sciences has approximately 200 organizational members, primarily professional societies like the American Society of Plant Taxonomists. Through its organizational membership AIBS represents approximately 250,000 life scientists. AIBS activities are focused in four broad areas: public policy, education, publication, and coordinating large-scale biological research infrastructure.

### Public policy

AIBS actively promotes the teaching of evolution in public schools. Most recently it coordinated a letter to members of the Louisiana House of Representatives urging them not to adopt an “academic freedom” bill that had been passed by the Louisiana Senate. The “academic freedom” bill is widely recognized as an effort to allow teachers and school boards to introduce intelligent design in the science curriculum. AIBS coordinated a similar letter to Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal urging him to veto the bill. Unfortunately, these efforts were unsuccessful.

AIBS is also actively engaged in promoting funding for biological research and education in Congress and federal agencies. As part of the Coalition for National Science Funding, AIBS co-sponsored a presentation on a Planetary Biodiversity Inventory project (catfish of the world) on Capitol Hill with the Natural Sciences Collection Alliance. It will also organize a briefing for congressional staffers in conjunction with the Association of Ecosystem Research Centers fall symposium. There may be an opportunity for graduate students interested in science policy to work at AIBS as interns. The American Society of Mammalogists sponsors an intern each year who spends 3-4 months working with AIBS policy staff on issues important to ASM. ASM provides financial support for the student. AIBS provides office space, logistical support, training, and supervision.

### Education

On May 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> AIBS hosted an NSF-sponsored Conversation in Undergraduate Biology and a Biology Education Summit at AAAS. Information about the meetings is available at [http://www.aibs.org/special-symposia/aibs\\_biology\\_education\\_summit.html](http://www.aibs.org/special-symposia/aibs_biology_education_summit.html). Plans are being developed to continue the conversations begun this spring. Specifically, a proposal to NSF’s Research Collaboration Network – Undergraduate Biology Education program is planned. Activities supported by proposal are intended to “(1) generate a shared vision of biology education of the future, (2) outline a model of introductory biology experiences focusing on how best to prepare biology students, and (3) build a network to connect individuals, projects, and societies actively engaged in the reform of undergraduate biology education to increase capacity in the reform movement.”

## Publication

More people probably know AIBS for *BioScience* than for any of its other activities. With the leadership of immediate Past-President Doug Futuyma, *BioScience* solicited articles from all of its member societies. Society leaders were asked to identify a member who could write an engaging, timely, and thought-provoking synthesis describing how modern methods are transforming the way scientific problems are investigated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Several articles commissioned through this project have already appeared. More are on the way.

Less widely known is the educational website <http://actionbioscience.org/>. Material on the ActionBioscience website is freely available to educators and students, both in English and in Spanish. Articles are commissioned by the editors and new material is added regularly.

AIBS was a founding member of BioOne, which provides on-line access to *Systematic Botany*. It has permanent representation on the BioOne Board. As publisher of one of BioOne's most prominent titles, it speaks effectively for the interest of publishers who participate in BioOne.<sup>1</sup>

## Research infrastructure

The National Ecological Observatory Network, NEON, is managed by NEON, Inc., a non-profit organization that was incorporated in fall 2006. AIBS played a crucial role in developing plans for NEON and in helping NEON, Inc. to establish itself as an independent entity. In fact, a large part of the budget currently supporting NEON activities is still funded through a grant to AIBS.

AIBS has a close working relationship with the Natural Sciences Collection Alliance. NCSA member institutions are automatically institutional members of AIBS. Because of this close alliance, ASPT may want to consider ways in which it could work more closely with AIBS to promote support of herbaria and collections-based botanical research.

## Summary

AIBS faces substantial financial challenges in the coming year.<sup>2</sup> It finished 2008 with a substantial deficit. While its survival is not in question, AIBS may not be able to continue all of its public policy, educational, publishing, and research infrastructure activities. I believe that continued ASPT involvement with AIBS is beneficial, both to ASPT and to the broader biological community. If ASPT's finances allow, it may be worth considering whether the benefit from AIBS's public policy activities is substantial enough that ASPT should increase the level of its contribution to public policy by making a separate contribution to support AIBS public policy activities.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I should mention for anyone who doesn't know that I chair the Board of BioOne as an at-large Director. As a result, ASPT has a direct line to BioOne leadership. Don't hesitate to use it.

<sup>2</sup> I serve on the AIBS Finance Committee.

<sup>3</sup> Disclaimer: For anyone who doesn't know, I was President of AIBS in 2006.