August 21, 2015

The Honorable Cory Gardner  
Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation  
512 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Gary Peters  
Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation  
254 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Gardner and Peters,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input regarding the scientific community’s priorities for the reauthorization for the America COMPETES Act.

Scientific research is an important engine that powers our nation’s economic growth. The National Science Foundation (NSF) is the federal agency that supports the fundamental scientific research that is the foundation upon which we build knowledge and inspire innovation. Through competitive, peer-reviewed research grants, the NSF funds discoveries that will help to solve the most challenging problems facing society. NSF research, education, and training programs lead to new patents, prepare a highly skilled workforce, and stimulate the creation of new jobs. Many of the groundbreaking ideas that have enhanced the nation’s economic competitiveness or improved the quality of our lives have grown from NSF-funded research.

These efforts, however, require a sustained federal investment. Unpredictable annual swings in federal funding disrupt research programs, create uncertainty in the research community, and stall the development of the next great idea. Funding for basic research has been stagnant in recent years, particularly when adjusted for inflation. Given the importance of research and development to our economic growth and global competitiveness, Congress should make new, multi-year investments in NSF.

We encourage the Committee to pursue a reauthorization bill that builds on the following principles:

- NSF should maintain its focus on fundamental discovery. The agency’s mission should not be driven towards commercial outcomes.
- Reauthorization of the NSF should outline a path for new investments. Sustained growth in funding is needed for programs that support basic research and science education.
- Congress should recognize the unique role of NSF as the only agency supporting the full breadth of scientific research and education.
• Congress should not pick winners and losers among NSF research programs. The National Science Board and leadership of the NSF must retain the authority and nimbleness to allocate funding among the disciplines.

• Legislation should support the existing merit review system. NSF’s peer review system has a proven track record of supporting high quality research that advances our knowledge and leads to solutions for the challenges facing modern society.

Again, we thank you for your leadership on this issue and hope that this and other science-related legislation might move through the Senate in a bipartisan way.

Sincerely,

Robert Gropp, Ph.D.
Interim Co-Executive Director
American Institute of Biological Sciences

Scott M. Lanyon, Ph.D.
President
American Ornithologists’ Union

Ellen Bergfeld, Ph.D.
CEO
American Society of Agronomy

Larry G. Allen, Ph.D.
President
American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists

Eileen A. Lacey, Ph.D.
President
American Society of Mammalogists

Mark Siddall, Ph.D.
President
American Society of Parasitologists

Julian I. Schroeder, Ph.D.
President
American Society of Plant Biologists

Patrick Herendeen, Ph.D.
President
American Society of Plant Taxonomists
Marilyn A. Norconk, Ph.D.  
President  
American Society of Primatologists

Olin E. Rhodes, Jr., Ph.D.  
President  
Association of Ecosystem Research Centers

Christopher Beck, Ph.D.  
President  
Association for Biology Laboratory Education

James Elser, Ph.D.  
President  
Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography

Robin L. Chazdon, Ph.D.  
Executive Director  
Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation

Leonard Krishtalka, Ph.D.  
Director  
Biodiversity Institute  
The University of Kansas

Richard Olmstead, Ph.D.  
President  
Botanical Society of America

Kenneth L. Heck, Jr., Ph.D.  
President  
Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation

Martin G. Raphael, Ph.D.  
President  
Cooper Ornithological Society

Ellen Bergfeld, Ph.D.  
CEO  
Crop Science Society of America
Monica G. Turner, Ph.D.
President
Ecological Society of America

Phillip G. Mulder, Jr., Ph.D.
President
Entomological Society of America

Jasper Rine, Ph.D.
President
Genetics Society of America

James Hanken, Ph.D.
Director
Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology

Peter English, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Human Anatomy and Physiology Society

Andreas Zedrosser, Ph.D.
Acting President
International Organization for Bear Research and Management

Susan J. Weller, Ph.D.
Executive Director
James Ford Bell Museum of Natural History and Planetarium

Robert B. Waide, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Long Term Ecological Research Network

Joseph A. Cook, Ph.D.
Museum Director
Museum of Southwestern Biology
University of New Mexico

Georgiana May, Ph.D.
President-Elect
Mycological Society of America
Nancy Rabalais, Ph.D.
President
National Association of Marine Laboratories

Sarah D. Oktay, Ph.D.
President
Organization of Biological Field Stations

Frederick W. Zechman, Ph.D.
President
Phycological Society of America

Michael Mares, Ph.D.
Director
Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History

Greg Schiefer
Executive Director
Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry of North America

Larry Page, Ph.D.
President
Natural Science Collections Alliance

Steven M. Holland, Ph.D.
President
Paleontological Society

David J. Caldwell, Ph.D.
President
Poultry Science Association

Luke J. Swetland
President and CEO
Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

Byron Adams, Ph.D.
President
Society of Nematologists
Janet Franklin, Ph.D.
President
US Regional Association of the International Association for Landscape Ecology