

# 45 BEACON

LETTER FROM HEADQUARTERS

## Preserving and Accessing Information Critical to Our Community

I worry about the future for our community from time to time. Not about the fate of the AMS as an organization, because I see evidence every day of the commitment of our members to the success of AMS programs. And not about the future of the professions served by the AMS, because I'm sure we all see the increasing impact our science and services have on society as a whole. No, those aspects of the future look exciting and vibrant and meaningful for our community. The aspect of the future that I worry about is whether those in our community a generation or two from now will be able to piece together the complete picture of how our science and services have reached the current levels of sophistication from the record we are leaving behind.

The journals and *BAMS* represent an important record of our science and of the profession, and I am confident that the commitment to preserve that content will not fail. But so much of the rest of what is written in the community appears to be at greater risk now than it was in decades past. In some cases, that is because we are creating much more of the record through transient electronic documents that may never find their way into an adequate archive. In other cases, it is because pressures of budgets and physical space have forced the nonjournal literature—the so-called “grey literature”—to be given an even lower priority in the collections of many organizations.

While the refereed journals represent the primary results on which future research can be based, the grey literature of technical reports, white papers, internal project memoranda, and other similar works make up a very important body of knowledge as well. It is the grey literature that often records the details of how various datasets were processed, models developed, parameters tested, and hundreds of other details. Those details may be briefly summarized or

cited in an article if the work is eventually published in the peer-reviewed journals, but in many cases, the grey literature reports stand on their own to fill crucial gaps that allow a more complete understanding of research that has been done. In other cases, these works provide data whose value will only be realized in years to come. The community needs to know that this information will be preserved and that it will be accessible to future generations who may depend on it to truly understand progress being made in our community at this time and to therefore be able to expand on that knowledge.

For decades we have depended on the library community to be the stewards of this information, and we have especially depended on a relatively small number of special libraries—most of them federally funded—whose mission has included the preservation of this crucial grey literature content (just as we depend on a relatively small number of data repositories to preserve the raw observations so critical to our science). As described by Jean Phillips, chair of the Atmospheric Sciences Librarians International, these libraries have been facing closures and downsizing, and the collections they house are at risk (see “Concern Over Federal Library Closures” in this section of *BAMS*). After you read the piece by Phillips, I think you will be worried, too. I encourage you to learn more about this important issue through additional reading or discussion with your organization's librarian or information specialist. There may be things that you or your organization can do to help.



**KEITH L. SEITTER, CCM**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## CONCERN OVER FEDERAL LIBRARY CLOSURES

In 2006, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) closed five of its regional libraries and reduced operating hours and staff at others to balance its budget. While the situation at the EPA has been at the forefront of news within the library community for the past year, downsizing within other federal agencies in the United States and Canada is occurring as well. In 2006, the Department of Energy closed its headquarters library, and NOAA terminated its portion of funding of the Atmospheric Sciences Modeling Division Library, which was part of the NOAA and EPA library networks. NASA is considering downsizing its library at Goddard Space Flight Center, and armed forces medical libraries and transportation libraries have also been cited as being at risk. Over the past several years, Environment Canada libraries have experienced deep cuts, as well.

The American Library Association (ALA), the Special Libraries Association (SLA), and other organizations have developed position papers or testi-

fied before Congress and have been instrumental in getting the word out to constituents about what is at stake. The Atmospheric Science Librarians International (ASLI), a nonprofit organization devoted to communication and dissemination of information among libraries and educational institutions involved in atmospheric science research and scholarship, has also written to chairs and ranking members of Senate and House committees that oversee appropriations, science, technology, and the environment. All of these organizations agree that the issues are as follows:

- Continued access to scientific information for scientists, researchers, and the public is vital if the United States is to maintain its leadership in the scientific enterprise.
- As the largest publisher of information, any planning for digitization of U.S. government documents needs to include comprehensive planning for information access, maintenance, and migration.

### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

American Libraries Online. "Opposition to EPA cut-backs increases." Posted 8 December 2006: [www.ala.org/ala/online/currentnews/newsarchive/2006abc/december2006/epaopposition.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/online/currentnews/newsarchive/2006abc/december2006/epaopposition.cfm).

American Library Association (ALA). EPA libraries: [www.ala.org/ala/washoff/woissues/governmentinfo/epalibraries/epalibraries.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/washoff/woissues/governmentinfo/epalibraries/epalibraries.cfm). Includes ALA President Leslie Burger's Senate testimony, background, status of EPA libraries, press releases, news stories and editorials.

American Library Association (ALA). Federal libraries wiki: [http://wikis.ala.org/fedlib/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://wikis.ala.org/fedlib/index.php/Main_Page). Formed to share and track information on threats to federal libraries, reorganizations, and closings.

Atmospheric Science Librarians International (ASLI): [www.aslionline.org](http://www.aslionline.org).

Bearden, David M., and Robert Esworthy. Restructuring EPA's libraries: Background and issues for Congress. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, updated 3 January 2007. Available for download from the Federation of American Scientists at <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/secrecy/RS22533.pdf>.

Dennie, Danielle, 2007: Environment libraries: An endangered species? *Feliciter*, 53, 102–103. (Canadian Library Association).

Odling-Smee, Lucy, 2007: Online resources threaten livelihood of libraries. *Nature*, 446, 958–959.

Reiterman, Tim, 2006: "Closure of 6 federal libraries angers scientists: Cost-cutting moves at the EPA and elsewhere deny researchers and the public access to vital data, critics say." *Los Angeles Times*, 8 December 2006, p. 21.

Special Libraries Association (SLA). SLA continues dialogue with U.S. Environmental protection Agency on library closures. 9 May 2007: [www.sla.org/content/SLA/pressroom/pressrelease/07pr/pr2712.cfm](http://www.sla.org/content/SLA/pressroom/pressrelease/07pr/pr2712.cfm). Includes: EPA Interim Library Policy, draft dispersion procedures, draft library usage statistics.

United States House of Representatives. Committees: [www.house.gov/house/CommitteeWWW.shtml](http://www.house.gov/house/CommitteeWWW.shtml).

United States Senate. Committees: [www.senate.gov/pagelayout/committees/d\\_three\\_sections\\_with\\_tasers/committees\\_home.htm](http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/committees/d_three_sections_with_tasers/committees_home.htm).

- Whether a library is virtual or exists in the physical world, librarians are key to designing and managing the interfaces for the ongoing work of digitization.
- Librarians are invaluable members of research teams who facilitate access to information, analyze for relevance and quality, and are increasingly important given the sheer number of resources available.

The federal fiscal year 2008 appropriations cycle has begun, with the House of Representatives and Senate agreeing on an overall budget plan as described in Concurrent Resolution 99 (to read the full resolution, go to [http://thomas.loc.gov/home/gpoxmlc110/hc99\\_rh.xml](http://thomas.loc.gov/home/gpoxmlc110/hc99_rh.xml)). If passed as described, 2008 would see increased funding for independent scientific research that provides “the foundation for innovation

and future technologies.” This could be great news for research scientists around the country—indeed, around the world.

What can you do? While supporting increased funding for basic science, the Atmospheric Science Librarians International (ASLI) encourages research scientists to contact congressional leaders and urge them to halt all federal library closures, and to take the necessary time to determine that adequate funding, planning, and staffing are in place to maintain current and future access to critical bodies of information. Let them know how access to federal libraries and librarians has facilitated your work. (See the “For Further Information” box for House and Senate committee information.)

We want to be sure that our scientific history is available to those charting our scientific future, whether in print or electronic form.

—JEAN PHILLIPS, ASLI CHAIR, 2007