

extremes" of pure molecular biologists or field biologists, respectively, "the bulk of scientists feel that the [proposed M/B split] is the wrong approach."

Supporters of Southwood point out that the Southwood report itself draws attention to the need for core studies in both B and M departments to include topics belonging to the other. The recommendations also tie in with arguments in favor of giving responsibility for funding all biological research—now divided among four councils in the UK—to a single council.

Whether the reforms will take hold is not yet clear. Officials at the UFC in London are now waiting for comments from the universities before deciding whether Southwood's proposals should be accepted as the broad framework of a more detailed review of individual biology departments. The universities have until the end of July to respond.

The Nottingham geneticists, having watched recent moves by the UFC to close down or merge small earth science, physics, and chemistry departments, fear the worst. "People may say that our arguments are just those of geneticists who are trying to defend their interests, and to an extent that is true," says Clarke. "But our interests are based on what we believe is the right arrangement for genetics; after all, that is the way we have evolved."

■ DAVID DICKSON

## Space Council Backs Landsat

As its first official act, the new National Space Council has unanimously recommended long-term federal support of the Landsat remote sensing satellites. The vote was taken at a 12 May meeting of the interagency group in the offices of its chairman, Vice President Dan Quayle.

If accepted by President Bush, the council's recommendation would translate into \$25 million for the continued operation of the current satellites, Landsats 4 and 5, plus \$73.4 million for the completion and launch of Landsat 6 in 1991. The money would be paid as a previously agreed upon subsidy to the EOSAT company of Landover, Maryland, which has been working since 1985 to commercialize Landsat.

The recommendation would also mark a sharp reversal of the Reagan Administration's efforts to cut Landsat loose from that subsidy. The council was reportedly convinced by the fact that few private Landsat customers have emerged, whereas federal agencies are spending \$7 million per year to use the data for environmental, resource estimate, and classified applications.

■ M. MITCHELL WALDROP

# Fire Devastates Jackson Lab

*If you have a standing order for a hundred mice every Monday morning, you're in trouble*

FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND research mice perished when fire swept the mouse production building at the Jackson Laboratory in Bar Harbor last week. Although a few breeding pairs of every type are safe, as are the lab's array of chromosomal mutants including NOD, motheaten, and quaker, scientists who count on a weekly care package of 100 nude mice are out of luck.

The Maine laboratory, which routinely exports more than 2 million mice a year to researchers in 33 nations, is one of the world's preeminent mouse suppliers. For the present, virtually all shipments of science's work-force mice such as the immunologically deficient nude mouse, and the basic C57Black, are on hold. Jackson scientists say it is "very optimistic" to estimate that the production facilities will be back up to 50% of capacity within a year. Other suppliers of science's most trusty mice may not be able to gear up production quickly enough to avoid delays in some areas of research.

The fire started about 1:15 in the afternoon on 10 May, apparently caused by the explosion of a propane tank in an area of the mouse house that was being renovated. Within minutes a human chain of mouse caretakers and researchers was on the scene, literally passing precious "foundation stock" of breeding pairs of the lab's mutant strains from hand to hand to get them out of the burning building. About 300 boxes, or some 1200 mice, were rescued.

This is the second time fire has taken its toll on the laboratory. In 1947 a raging blaze that caused major destruction over miles of Mt. Desert Island wiped out the lab's entire mouse colony. Then, researchers all over the world who had JAX mice voluntarily returned breeding pairs so the colony could be restored.

This time, the chore of reproducing millions of mice will be made easier by the fact that the foundation stocks and unique chromosomal mutants are intact. Nevertheless, the challenge to research is substantial.

Larry Mobraaten, who heads the breeding program, has already put out the word that the lab would welcome any donated space from institutions that might have some unused rooms in their own animal facilities. In addition, Jackson mouse breeders will be contacting their research customers to see whether some people will be able

to carry on by breeding their own animals until the lab's supply is built up.

However, the best guess is that this might work only on a hit-and-miss basis. Several strains of mice are notoriously difficult to breed, and it may not be possible to duplicate the unique environment of the Jackson



**Mouse catastrophe.** Hundreds of thousands of animals were lost in the 10 May fire.

mouse house which caters to a mouse's every whim when it comes to diet, lighting, and temperature. As Yale University mouse geneticist Frank Ruddle puts it, the lab's inbred mice, by very virtue of inbreeding, are not always "sturdy" creatures and getting them to reproduce can be tricky.

And cost is an issue. To get a C57Black shipped from Bar Harbor costs less than \$5 a mouse. A nude mouse, more difficult to breed, goes for \$25. But the cost of setting up even a small mouse room is substantially more. The standard cost of mouse maintenance is 15 cents per mouse per day; a modest breeding colony can cost \$100,000 or more a year.

Researchers, meanwhile, have few options.

They can defer experiments, scale them back, or try to purchase animals from other