SCIENCESCOPE

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SHARON GUYNUP

On the table. Forum will discuss research strategies on endangered species, like this Ridley turtle.

White House Plans Environmental Summit

Last month's science policy forum was such a hit that the White House has decided to repeat the process next week for environmental researchers. But this time officials have more than conversation in mind; they want to devise a comprehensive strategy that will guide the government's $6 billion investment next year in environmental research.

The meeting, to be held 28-30 March at the National Academy of Sciences, is being called a "National Forum on Environment and Natural Resources R&D." Like its science policy predecessor (*Science*, 11 February, p. 752), the environmental forum will feature senior White House and congressional leaders, including Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and, possibly, Vice President Al Gore. But rather than conducting a broad discussion on the role of research, as took place at the first forum, each of the 175 invited participants from academia, industry, and the nonprofit sector will be asked to critique draft documents laying out strategies for one of seven areas relating to the environment—from global change and biodiversity to air quality and toxic waste. The 10-page papers have been prepared by subcommittees of the interagency Committee on the Environment and Natural Resources, part of the new White House National Science and Technology Council.

"We wanted to hear from the community if we're going in the right direction before anything is locked in place," says the committee's cochair, Robert Watson, associate director for the environment in the Office of Science and Technology Policy.

European Researchers Get Partial Reprieve

European researchers hoping to get support for their work from the European Union (EU) can breathe a little easier. Earlier this week, the European Parliament turned what would have been a deep cut in the EU's research plans into one that will be less painful. This is particularly good news to scientists in Eastern Europe, for the action has saved some aid programs from being gutted.

Just before Christmas, science ministers from the EU's 12 member states trimmed about $1 billion from the EU's proposed research budget for the next 5 years, cutting it from about $11.5 billion to about $10.5 billion. The ministers did, however, leave open the possibility of adding back about $875 million at a later date, if Europe's economic climate improves (*Science*, 17 December 1993, p. 1807).

The ministers do not have the last word, however. Under new rules introduced last fall, the EU's research budget must be approved by the European Parliament—which has long advocated higher science spending. Earlier this week, parliamentary representatives won a compromise from the EU nations that will restore about $260 million of the threatened cuts. This money would come from the $875 million being held in reserve.

The proposed cut would have decimated the EU's international science collaborations section, which spends almost half its budget on aid to eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Its $690 million request would have dropped to a mere $368 million. Instead, the compromise will provide $474 million for these programs. Even so, that represents a cut of some 30%, compared to the EU's current science aid budget. "We still have suffered most," says Rainer Gerold, who runs the EU's international science collaborations office.

Minnesota Kills Controversial Drug

A life-saving transplant drug called antilymphocyte globulin (ALG) is hovering near death after the University of Minnesota failed to find a company interested in manufacturing what had once been the nation's leading antirejection drug.

On 19 March, the university formally closed its ALG operation, begun in 1971 and until recently hailed as a shining example of the university's effort to capitalize on its technology and inventions. ALG has generated $60 million in revenues since Minnesota transplant surgeon John Najarian first started to manufacture it. But the sales were almost all illegal because ALG had never been approved for commercial use. In 1992, the Food and Drug Administration halted clinical use of the drug. Najarian, who last year resigned as head of the surgery department, is the focus of a grand jury investigation (*Science*, 17 December 1993, p. 1812).

The final straw was the university's inability to find a buyer to restart the program. Only six companies expressed any interest, and none submitted a final offer. The companies told university officials that it would take too long—and cost too much—to regain the market share ALG has lost to competing drugs in the last 18 months.

Minnesota will now lay off the remaining 23 employees in the program and attempt to rent or sell the $12.5 million facility the university built in 1987 to manufacture ALG. The final irony, says Minnesota transplant researcher Arthur Matas, was that even as the university was preparing to kill the program, Minnesota surgeons were using ALG under a special compassionate-use exemption to successfully transplant a kidney in a 5-year-old boy who had failed to respond to competing drugs. "The patients are the ones who are going to suffer" when ALG is no longer available, he says. "It's a real shame."

Livermore's Nuckolls Under Fire

LAWRENCE LIVERMORE NATIONAL LABORATORY

Nuclear physicist John Nuckolls has accused "dissatisfied employees and special interest groups" of trying to oust him as director of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. In a statement released last week, Nuckolls said that an outside review panel commissioned by the University of California, which runs Livermore for the Department of Energy (DOE), displayed a "negative bias" in its January report of his performance over the past 5 years. Specifically, he said the panel was influenced by critics of his leadership of the $1 billion nuclear weapons laboratory as it tries to adapt to the post-Cold War era.

The Nuckolls statement comes in the wake of an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, which reported that UC officials were trying to use the performance report to push Nuckolls out. In his statement, Nuckolls said that he told colleagues last summer, at the end of his first 5 years as director of the lab, that he did not intend to serve another 5 years. Nuckolls, who first came to Livermore as a scientist in 1955 as a protégé of nuclear weapons pioneer Edward Teller, noted that Livermore directors during periods of great change have traditionally served for less than 6 years. "In April I will complete my sixth year as director," he observed.

Nuckolls said that any actions during this period of uncertainty were bound to draw criticism. "Some critics have objected that we are not moving decisively to abandon our defense missions....This is not new."

Nuckolls told the *Chronicle* that he wants to stay at least until February, when a DOE advisory panel on the future of the labs is expected to announce its conclusions. But one top DOE official predicts that he will be gone by this summer.