



Ecological Society of America
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May 4, 2020

BY ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION

Dr. Kelvin K. Droegemeier
Director, Office of Science and Technology Policy
Eisenhower Executive Office Building
1650 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20504

Response to OSTP Request for Information – FR Doc. 2020-06622 – “Public Access to Peer-Reviewed Scholarly Publications, Data and Code Resulting From Federally Funded Research”

Dear Dr. Droegemeier,

The Ecological Society of America (ESA) is grateful for the opportunity to respond to this request for information. We write to caution OSTP against adopting a policy mandating the free distribution of peer-reviewed manuscripts earlier than one year after publication.

Founded in 1915, ESA is the world’s largest community of professional ecologists and a trusted source of ecological knowledge. The 9,000 member Society publishes five peer-reviewed [journals](#) and a membership bulletin. ESA journal revenue not only supports the peer review process, but also many other vital programs, including education, outreach and membership services to advance the science of ecology.

Ultimately, we strive to support the progress of science by producing and broadly disseminating the highest quality peer-reviewed journals possible. Publishers and societies have worked to strengthen scholarly communication and promote open science. We at the ESA were early to adopt open science initiatives, with our launch of *Ecosphere*, our fully Open Access journal in 2010. Subsequently, our other research journals have offered Gold Open Access options since 2016. However, it is critical that these efforts take place within a framework that respects intellectual property rights and our ability to invest in high-quality publications and that it does not hinder researchers.

As you are aware, federal agencies currently require that peer-reviewed manuscripts be made freely available online—within one year of publication—if they discuss research funded at least in part by a government grant.¹ This policy represents a significant compromise that balances our shared goals of providing broad access with the need for our organization to recoup the substantial investments we make in mentoring of early-career scientists, training of editors, teaching reviewers, guiding authors, editing and quality control, managing and curating data,

¹These policies were developed pursuant to OSTP’s requirement that agencies “shall use a twelve-month post-publication embargo period as a guideline for making research papers publicly available . . .” See OSTP Memorandum on “Increasing Access to the Results of Federally Funded Scientific Research” (Feb. 22, 2013).

managing access to pre-prints, collecting and editing images/figures, and organizing and typesetting for online delivery of these published articles. This one-year compromise contrasts with the length of a full copyright term of 'life-of-the-author plus 70 years. Removing the one-year embargo would shift the burden of publication costs from the publisher to the author, who would be required to pay the higher fees associated with open access. Importantly, the current one-year embargo compromise reflects Congress' guidance (in the authorizing legislation for the current policy) that the Administration must "take into consideration the role that scientific publishers play in the peer review process in ensuring the integrity of the record of scientific research, including the investments and added value that they make."²

Reducing or eliminating the current one-year embargo would significantly jeopardize our organization's ability to invest in producing the high-quality peer-reviewed journals that our readers in the ecological and biological community rely on. In so doing, such a policy would contravene Congress' clear guidance to take our role and investments into consideration. Furthermore, such a policy would directly result in a reduction in either the quantity or quality (or more likely, both) of peer-reviewed journal articles produced by hundreds of organizations like ours. This change would also harm both the research enterprise and the practitioners, independent consultants, nonprofit/NGO staff, government regulators/administrators, public policymakers, students, and post-docs responsible for the scholarly journals we produce.

ESA respectfully urges you not to disrupt our ability to support the advancement of ecological science, and we look forward to working together to identify solutions that advance the goals of open science without undermining the communication of research findings and analyses through peer-reviewed journals.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit these comments.

Sincerely,

Oswaldo Sala
President

² America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2010, Section 103(b)(9), *available at*: <https://www.congress.gov/111/plaws/publ358/PLAW-111publ358.pdf>.