**NATIONAL AFFAIRS AND LEGISLATION CONFERENCE\***

**Washington, DC – February 27 – March 2, 2017**

During the week of February 27 to March 2, 2017, 300 members of GCA garden clubs met in Washington, D.C. to tackle the tough issues that challenge our environment. With a focus on the subjects of the eight GCA position papers (Transportation; Sustainable Agriculture, Seed Diversity, and Food Security; Native Plants; National Public Lands; National Parks; Climate Change; Clean Water; and Clean Air), scientists and researchers spoke about the impact of climate change on the food supply, the national parks, air, water, and the environment. Problems of the national outdated infrastructure and the visual blight of digital billboards were highlighted. Policymakers discussed how they intend to balance the country’s economic needs with the long-term need to protect and preserve the environment. Green Fingers Garden Club members also met in private sessions with Senators Blumenthal and Murphy and a representative of Congressman Himes.

A summary of some recent relevant bills and actions are listed below:

* On February 14, U.S. Rep. Mike Quigley (D-IL), vice chair of the Sustainable Energy & Environment Coalition, and Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) introduced the Botanical Sciences and Native Plant Materials Research, Restoration, and Promotion Act to build capacity in the botanical sciences. The bill, H.R. 1054, responds to the GCA's long-standing call for more botanists and the protection of native plants on public lands. The NAL Committee has been working with the Chicago Botanic Garden and other organizations to refine and promote this legislation.
* Throughout this year, the National Affairs and Legislation Committee and the Conservation Committee have rigorously advocated for the approval of HR 4680, the National Park Service Centennial Act. Our advocacy efforts were supported by many of GCA Clubs and their members. The visual example of support can be seen on ‘Park It’, with more than 1,000 members of GCA clubs posting their national park visits. Advocacy takes many forms.

A highlight of the three days was the presentation by 17 year-old Brigitte Harbers whose very personal story of loss led her to a passion for saving the Maui dolphin from extinction in the waters around New Zealand, an ongoing effort. Through Conservation International, Brigitte was able to intern and become a devoted advocate for the preservation of this enchanting creature, whose numbers have increased from 55 in 2012 to 63 at last report.

\* Report is summarized from information taken from GCA website on NAL conference.