This year the Botanical Society of America Merit Award Committee was tasked with overseeing the process of choosing recipients of both the Merit Award and the new Emerging Leaders Award. The BSA Merit Award is “the highest honor our Society can bestow. Awardees are chosen based on their outstanding contributions to the mission of the Society,” with “demonstrated excellence in basic research, education, public policy, or who have provided exceptional service to the professional botanical community, or who may have made contributions to a combination of these categories.”

The committee generally consists of five to seven regular members appointed by the BSA President for a three-year term, with representation of the breadth of disciplines in the society. The Chair of the committee is appointed by the President for a one year term.

The 2014 Merit Award Committee comprised the following members: Bruce Baldwin (Chair), Bill Dahl (Executive Director, ex officio), Pam Diggle (President, ex officio), Norm Ellstrand, Pat Gensel, Susan Kalisz, Pam Soltis, and Alison Snow.

Concerns expressed by the 2013 Merit Award Committee in its annual report were resolved prior to formation of the 2014 Merit Award Committee. In response to the concern that there was a lack of clear guidelines about the number of awards to be granted each year, with the number varying between one and six or more, the BSA Board instituted a policy that no more than two Merit Awards were to be granted per year. The strong heterogeneity among nomination packages in 2013, in terms of supporting letters for each person and amount of other supporting material, was not a problem for any of the nominations in 2014, presumably because of clearer guidelines for nominators.
Three nominations for the Merit Award were received by the March 15th deadline, for Michael Donoghue, Jim Doyle, and Jeff Doyle. Based on the newly imposed limit of two awardees per year, each member of the committee was tasked with not only carefully reviewing the three nomination packages but also sequentially ranking the candidates. Compilation of those rankings placed one candidate above the other two, who in turn were tied for second place. Given the great strength of all three candidates and the disparity in rankings across the members of the committee, it was decided by unanimous agreement that the tie should be respected, and that three awards were warranted and in the spirit of the Board's earlier decision, under such exceptional circumstances. The committee also recommended that the limit of two awards per year should remain in place and continue to be respected.

The new BSA Emerging Leaders Award is “to be given each year in recognition of creative and influential scholarship in any area of botany reflecting the breadth of BSA” to a single recipient within eight years of receiving a Ph.D. That recipient “will have produced outstanding scholarship and also demonstrated exceptional future promise for future accomplishment.”

Nine applications for the Emerging Leaders Award were received by the March 15th deadline, for Madelaine Bartlett, Uromi Goodale, Sean Hoban, Anna Jacobsen, Ingrid Jordan-Thaden, Mike Martin, Emily Sessa, Stacey Smith, and Jonathan Wilson. The Merit Award Committee members were tasked with considering all of the applicants’ materials and sequentially ranking them. The committee was highly impressed by the entire pool of candidates and their ranking was difficult. Nonetheless, one applicant, Stacey Smith, emerged from the rankings as the unequivocal top choice of the committee.

Bruce G. Baldwin (submitted on behalf of the committee)
July 10, 2014