

Dr. John Holdren, Director  
Office of Science and Technology Policy  
Executive Office of the President  
725 17th Street Room 5228  
Washington, DC 20502

23 July 2009

Dear Dr. Holdren:

On behalf of the **California Academy of Sciences**, I write to express our strong support for the Natural Science Collections Alliance (NSC Alliance) proposed Executive Order for issuance by President Obama to promote the preservation and use of scientific collections.

Our nation's natural science collections, whether at the Smithsonian Institution, an independent or university-affiliated natural history museum, or a science department at a small liberal arts college, are irreplaceable resources that enable us to understand the world in which we live. These specimen and data collections not only help us understand the biological and physical history of earth, they also are essential to our ability to understand how earth systems function today and how they may function in an ever changing world.

As one of our esteemed Fellows, you are well aware that since its founding in 1853, the California Academy of Sciences and other leading research museums around the world have been motivated by the deep-seated urge to understand Nature's material basis, its processes of change and the origins and influence of humans in natural systems. As we enter an era of accelerating human-induced extinction of species and depletion of many natural resources, however, there is a new urgency to gaining knowledge of the natural world. This knowledge, much of it driven by basic research to understand life's diversity and evolution, now contributes to applications both valuable and necessary in promoting human wellbeing. Organisms and species are crucial components of ecosystems which help insure our food, water, shelter and energy. Without diverse communities of individuals and species, ecosystems are measurably less resilient to environmental change. Organisms also provide a wellspring of unique genes and compounds useful for public health, medicine, environmental remediation, and potential energy development. Evolutionary scientists at research museums like the California Academy of Sciences and elsewhere build and use their collections to identify, study, and promote conservation of these organisms, both microscopic and macroscopic, before they and the useful insights we may draw from them are lost.

The proposed Executive Order sends a strong message to the natural science collections research and education community. In short, it would demonstrate that the Obama Administration is aware of the important role our institutions play in the nation's scientific research and education enterprise. Moreover, it would demonstrate that federal support and use of data from scientific collections has been hindered by inadequate coordination of planning and budgets. The Executive Order would establish a formal mechanism by which federal agencies could ensure

wise and strategic investments in this important and irreplaceable part of our research infrastructure.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. If you are ever back in San Francisco, I would welcome an opportunity to provide you and your guests with a tour of our wonderful new, green home in Golden Gate Park.

Best regards,

David P. Mindell, Ph.D.  
Dean of Science and Research Collections  
Harry W. and Diana V. Hind Chair