



March 22, 2010

The Honorable Daniel Lipinski
1717 Longworth House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of The Field Museum, I commend and thank you for your efforts to reauthorize the America COMPETES Act and for the Subcommittee's recent hearings on the needs of our nation's research infrastructure. As your deliberations continue, we request that the Subcommittee include the nation's natural science collections in the legislation reauthorizing the America COMPETES Act.

Natural science collections are an essential component of the nation's research and science education infrastructure. These collections consist of physical specimens and associated data that are preserved, catalogued, and managed by museums, government agencies, universities, and other organizations. Natural science collections have been built through the collective work of generations of scientists and are irreplaceable records of earth history. In addition to contributing to fundamental research in all areas of science, natural science collections inform our understanding of and response to current problems, such as invasive species, earth systems response to climate change, or biodiversity discovery and conservation.

For many years, members of the scientific collections community have warned that a renewed national focus on the nation's scientific collections is needed. This concern was recognized by the Office of Science and Technology Policy several years ago when it chartered the Interagency Working Group on Scientific Collections (IWGSC). This panel characterized the status and needs of federal agency collections. Unfortunately, the IWGSC failed to fully consider the needs of non-federal collections.

Because the IWGSC incompletely considered the needs of non-federal collections, and because of the value in assignment of priority by the Administration as a whole, the Natural Science Collections Alliance and other scientific societies and organizations have asked President Obama to promulgate an executive order to promote the preservation and use of scientific collections. The proposed order would establish a persistent and

formalized federal structure to consider the needs of federal and non-federal science collections. To date, however, the proposed executive order has not been issued, and the NSC Alliance encourages the Subcommittee to include the text of the order in your legislation, revised as appropriate to reflect Congressional authorship and to include an authorization for appropriations. The text of the proposed order, as you may note, establishes a process on advance planning and programs for scientific collections, but is not regulatory. We are unaware of any agency or organization that is opposed to what the order would promulgate. The lack of action, we believe, is simply due to differing priorities.

NSC Alliance is a nonprofit association that supports natural science collections, their human resources, the institutions that house them, and their research activities for the benefit of science and society. The Field Museum is a member of long standing, and our Executive Vice President, Dr. Jim Croft, is a board member. The Field Museum is an independent nonprofit museum that is deeply concerned about all the issues surrounding natural science collections and their usefulness for research, exhibitions, academic and informal science education, and outreach activities.

Thank you for your consideration of our request and for your efforts on behalf of our nation's scientific enterprise. Please feel free to contact me at 312-665-7210, by fax at 312-665-7216, or via email to jmccarter@fieldmuseum.org.

Sincerely,

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