



NATURAL SCIENCE COLLECTIONS ALLIANCE

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April 28, 2010

The Honorable Bart Gordon
Chairman, House Committee on Science and Technology
2306 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Gordon:

The Natural Science Collections Alliance (NCS Alliance) commends your dedication to advancing the nation's scientific research and education enterprises, as exemplified by your efforts to reauthorize the America COMPETES Act. I write today in reference to Section 121 of HR 5116.

Scientific collections are integral to the nation's global leadership in scientific research and are essential educational resources that will inspire and educate our next generation of scientists and teachers. The natural science collections community is pleased to see that scientific collections are included in HR 5116. As you know, Section 121 would direct the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) in consultation with relevant Federal agencies to "ensure the development of formal policies for the management and use of Federal scientific collections to improve the quality, organization, access, including online access, and long-term preservation of such collections for the benefit of the scientific enterprise."

We support the inclusion of this provision in HR 5116, but ask that you work to expand the charge to OSTP to include non-Federal collections. In brief, the advancement of scientific research and education requires increased access to all scientific collections, not just Federal collections. Non-Federal facilities, such as free-standing or university-based natural science collections, contain unique specimens that are not included in Federal collections. In addition, these institutions often hold and curate Federal specimens. It is important that Federal collections planning and policy consider the needs and constraints of these collections. Moreover, non-Federal collections are vital to the work of Federal scientists and managers from various agencies. Thus, it is important that all scientific collections be considered a national priority and that planning reflect the interconnected nature of Federal and non-Federal scientific collections.

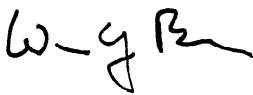
It is for these reasons that the NSC Alliance has asked the President to sign an Executive Order for the Preservation and Use of Scientific Collections. The proposed policy would direct Federal agencies whose actions may affect collections to identify those actions and as feasible cooperate with stakeholders to enhance and preserve the collections and to advance access to and use of them by stakeholders. The order would direct Federal agencies that use science collections to consider cost-effective uses of existing collections and the facilities that hold them before establishing new collections and facilities. This, in short, is to ensure that Federal agencies do not at great cost develop new facilities and new collections if existing collections and facilities, such as those held by NSC Alliance member institutions, can address the needs of the agencies with excellence and at less cost.

The inclusion of Federal scientific collections in HR 5116 is greatly appreciated. However, NSC Alliance continues to assert that planning for Federal science collections in isolation from non-Federal collections is inefficient and may result in redundancies or problems downstream. A prudent course of action is for Federal and non-Federal science collections to work collaboratively to ensure maximum efficiencies and that actions implemented by Federal collections will not be incompatible with those of their non-Federal partners. We ask that you consider including in HR 5116 the policy objectives articulated in the NSC Alliance proposed executive order.

I and other members of the NSC Alliance would welcome an opportunity to further discuss these issues with you as the reauthorization of the COMPETES Act moves through the legislative process. Please do not hesitate to contact me at wbrown@whrc.org or at 508-540-9900 x 133 or NSC Alliance director of public policy Dr. Robert Gropp at rgropp@aibs.org or 202-628-1500 x 250.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of these issues and for recognizing the importance of scientific collections to our nation's research and education enterprises.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W-Y-B' with a stylized flourish at the end.

William Y. Brown, Ph.D.
President, NSC Alliance, and
President and CEO, Woods Hole Research Center