

**Testimony in Support of FY 2014 Funding for the
Department of the Interior**

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Submitted by:

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Senate Committee on Appropriations

Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

The Natural Science Collections Alliance appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in support of fiscal year (FY) 2014 appropriations for the Department of the Interior (DOI). We encourage Congress to provide the DOI Working Capital Fund with at least \$62.0 million in FY 2014. The NSC Alliance also supports the Administration's budget request for the United States Geological Survey (USGS), which utilizes and curates various scientific collections in support of USGS science and provides collections-based information to other DOI bureaus. We encourage Congress to also work to provide adequate funding for the scientific collections maintained by other DOI bureaus, such as the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Fish and Wildlife Service. These collections are used to inform resource management and support law enforcement efforts.

The Natural Science Collections Alliance is a non-profit 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. Our membership consists of institutions which are part of an international community of museums, botanical gardens, herbaria, universities, and other institutions that contain natural science collections and use them in research, exhibitions, academic and informal science education, and outreach activities.

Scientific collections are a vital component of our nation's research infrastructure. Whether held at a national museum, government managed laboratory or archive, or in a university science department, these scientific resources contain genetic, tissue, organismal, and environmental samples that constitute a unique and irreplaceable library of the Earth's history. The specimens and their associated data drive cutting edge research on significant challenges facing modern society, such as improving human health, enhancing food security, and understanding and responding to environmental change. Collections also inspire novel interdisciplinary research that drives innovation and addresses some of the most fundamental questions related to biodiversity.

The institutions that care for scientific collections are important research centers that enable scientists to study the basic data of life, conduct modern biological, geological, and environmental research, and provide undergraduate and graduate students with hands-on training opportunities.

The federal Interagency Working Group on Scientific Collections (IWGSC) was established by President Bush to evaluate the status of federally owned object-based scientific collections. In 2009, the IWGSC reported that, “scientific collections are essential to supporting agency missions and are thus vital to supporting the global research enterprise.” In response, in 2010, the Office of Science and Technology Policy directed federal agencies to budget for the proper care of collections. “Agencies should ensure that their collections’ necessary costs are properly assessed and realistically projected in agency budgets, so that collections are not compromised.”

We are pleased to see that DOI has included an increase of \$2.0 million in its budget request for the Cultural and Scientific Collections program. Interior is an important caretaker of museum collections; the Department has an estimated 146 million items, which is second in size to the Smithsonian Institution. Although many of the department’s collections are located in bureau facilities, artifacts and specimens are also housed by non-governmental facilities, such as museums and universities.

The FY 2014 budget request would implement a multi-year action plan to address recommendations made by the DOI Inspector General regarding Interior’s accountability for its cultural and scientific specimens. In a December 2009 report, the Inspector General found that DOI has failed to properly accession, catalogue, or inventory museum collections, leaving artifacts “unavailable for research, education, or display and . . . subject to theft, deterioration, and damage.” The proposed budget increase would reduce the collections’ accessioning and cataloging backlog; identify and assess collections housed at non-federal locations; correct identified deficiencies in accountability, preservation, and protection of Interior cultural and scientific collections; and pursue opportunities for consolidation of bureau and non-bureau facilities housing collections.

We support the proposed DOI study of bureau and non-bureau facilities housing biological collections to determine the potential for economies of scale, improvements of oversight and accountability, and space reduction. Because excellent public and private facilities already exist in every state, we believe the study is likely to conclude that contracting with existing bio-repositories that have the experience and expertise to house and curate the collections and associated data will be the most efficient and cost-effective means by which federal agencies can access the collections data required to accomplish agency missions. We applaud the increased recognition by DOI and other federal departments of the immense importance of biological collections and the data they provide in support of the nation’s research enterprise that ultimately drives economic growth, improves human health, addresses energy needs, and enables sustainable management of our natural resources.

The National Park Service is also planning to continue its investments in scientific collections. The proposed budget would support plans to catalog an additional two million museum objects

in FY 2014. Additionally, several parks will complete collections plans for fire protection, pest management, storage, and emergency operations.

The United States Geological Survey would expand its efforts to preserve, inventory, and digitize geological scientific collections, such as rock and ice cores, fossils, and samples of oil, gas, and water. The proposed \$400,000 increase within Core Science Systems would be used to help states with collections management, improve accessibility of collections data, and expand digitization of specimens.

Conclusion

Scientific collections are an important part of our nation's research enterprise. Research specimens connect us to the past, are used to solve current societal problems, and are helping to predict future environmental changes. Continued investments in scientific collections are critical for our nation's continued scientific leadership. Please support the budget request for the Department of the Interior's Capital Working Fund, which will support Interior's efforts to preserve scientific collections – a truly irreplaceable resource.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this request.