

## **Testimony in Support of FY 2016 Funding for the Department of the Interior**

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***Submitted by:***

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***Submitted to:***

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) 2016 appropriations for the Department of the Interior (DOI). We encourage Congress to provide the DOI Working Capital Fund with at least \$74.5 million in FY 2016. We also encourage Congress to provide adequate funding for the scientific collections maintained by the United States Geological Survey, 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 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.

According to the federal Interagency Working Group on Scientific Collections, "scientific collections are essential to supporting agency missions and are thus vital to supporting the global

research enterprise.” In recognition of the importance of collections, the Office of Science and Technology Policy issued a memo in 2010 that 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.”

Preservation of specimens is not only in the best interest of science, it is also in the best interest of taxpayers. Proper care of existing scientific collections is typically more cost effective than recollecting the information. Moreover, preservation of specimens and associated data allows for integration into new research. Specimens that were collected decades or centuries ago are often used in cutting edge research in the fields of genetics, biodiversity, and human health.

We are pleased to see that DOI has included an increase of \$1.0 million in its budget request for the Cultural and Scientific Collections Management initiative. 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 United States Geological Survey (USGS) plans to maintain 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 National Geological and Geophysical Data Preservation program helps States with collections management, improves accessibility of collections data, and expands digitization of specimens. We are grateful to Congress for awarding additional funds for this program in FY 2014. USGS plans to maintain the expanded program in FY 2016.

Another USGS program is supporting public access to biodiversity information. The Biodiversity Information Serving Our Nation system is the only web-based federal resource for finding species in the United States and contains 168 million records. It also serves as the U.S. connection to the Global Biodiversity Information Facility.

The National Park Service is planning to continue its investments in scientific collections. The proposed budget would support plans to catalog an additional two million museum objects in FY 2016. Additionally, several parks will address planning, environmental, storage, security, and fire protection deficiencies in museum collections.

## **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. Sustained 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.