

March 19, 2008

Dr. Ronald Yasbin
Dean, College of Sciences
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Box 454001
4505 South Maryland Parkway
Las Vegas, NV 89154-4001

Dr. Brett R. Riddle
Professor of Biology
School of Life Sciences
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
4505 Maryland Parkway
Las Vegas, NV 89154-4004

Dear Dean Yasbin and Professor Riddle:

It has recently come to my attention that the School of Life Sciences at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas plans to transfer the current half-time herbarium curator position to the Department of Geosciences. As president of the Natural Science Collections Alliance and emeritus director of the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, I am deeply concerned by this proposed action that will result in the demise of the Wesley E. Niles Herbarium. Curatorial staff are essential to maintaining natural science collections. Without appropriate curation, collections quickly lose their value to research and education and can be quickly lost. Indeed, members of the museum community are concerned that the Niles Herbarium has only had a half-time curator to this point.

I recognize that budget conditions can force difficult decisions. However, collections such as the Niles Herbarium contain irreplaceable specimens vital to our national research enterprise. The Niles Herbarium has a valuable regional focus that many larger collections lack. Thus, the Herbarium is a significant component of our nation's biological and environmental research infrastructure.

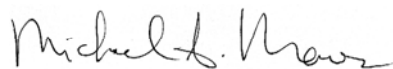
Population growth, diminishing water supplies, and global climate change are placing great stress on the southwestern United States. The Niles Herbarium, if adequately maintained and staffed, is well positioned to contribute to the scientific research that is required to appropriately respond to these challenges. Neglecting the Herbarium, even for a short period of time, by eliminating this important curatorial staff position will slow research for years to come. Moreover, it will hinder the University's ability to be a leading research center positioned to contribute to improving our understanding of life and the development of sustainable environmental practices that will serve Nevada, the southwest, and the nation.

There is a renewed national recognition of the importance and contributions of collections to our nation's scientific infrastructure. The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy has identified federal science collections as a priority for federal agencies, and established an interagency working group to conduct a needs assessment of government collections. The decision to decrease

support for the Niles Herbarium at this point in time is short sighted and ill timed. While budget constraints can lead administrators to eliminate support for collections personnel or operations, such cuts are short-term actions that inevitably have long-term deleterious effects. Collections represent the intellectual and scientific accrual of information over decades (in the case of this herbarium, more than 4 decades), and budgetary cuts can lead to the loss of this irreplaceable resource, doing damage to Nevada and the nation's biological infrastructure, and to future generations of scientists, students, and citizens who require access to information stored in this collection: information that is now threatened.

The Natural Science Collections Alliance strongly encourages the University of Nevada at Las Vegas to reconsider the proposed staff transfer. I would welcome an opportunity to discuss this matter with you further or with other officials at the University if you believe it would be helpful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael A. Mares".

Michael A. Mares, Ph.D.
President