



NATURAL SCIENCE COLLECTIONS ALLIANCE

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Re: Request for comments regarding update of Charting the Course (74 Federal Register 29524)

Dear Members of the Joint Subcommittee on Ocean Science and Technology,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the update of the January 2007 report, "Charting the Course for Ocean Science in the United States for the Next Decade: An Ocean Research Priorities Plan and Implementation Strategy." The Natural Science Collections Alliance (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. We are comprised of over 100 institutions who are part of an international community of museums, botanical gardens, herbariums, universities and other institutions that house natural science collections and utilize them in research, exhibitions, academic and informal science education, and outreach activities.

The 2007 Charting the Course report was an important milestone in the coordination of a comprehensive, long-range ocean science research plan. The NSC Alliance appreciates the recognition that report gave to museums and other science centers for their role in educating the public about the oceans. Natural science collections and the institutions that house them serve national education needs as well as underpin scientific research in many fields, from anthropology to marine ecology to zoology. Although revisions to Charting the Course should identify and prioritize new areas of research, it is also important that the revised plan reflect the importance of a sustained investment in our established research infrastructure, including natural science collections.

Natural science collections, whether housed at a university, museum, or marine laboratory, are essential to any research effort that seeks to understand living and non-living marine resources. These scientific collections hold important genetic, tissue, organism, and environmental samples. With these specimens, researchers are able to answer questions about the impacts of climate change, the spread of invasive species and disease, and the loss of biological diversity. Without this knowledge, scientists are unable to develop models that forecast future ecosystem responses to environmental change. In short, research utilizing natural science collection specimens informs sound environmental stewardship.

The Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) recognized the value of scientific collections by commissioning the Interagency Working Group on Scientific Collections (IWGSC). In a report released in December 2008, the IWGSC acknowledged the diversity of the hundreds of scientific collections owned and maintained by federal agencies. The working group found that "these scientific collections are essential to supporting agency missions and are thus vital to supporting the

global research enterprise.” Although the IWGSC report addresses the needs of science collections held or supported by the federal government, the majority of items in science collections are held by non-federal institutions whose federal support, if any, is far less than the cost of collection management. A revised Charting the Course report should reflect this and provide a plan for the sustained support and expansion of federal and non-federal marine natural science collections.

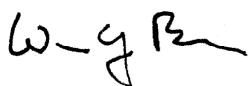
The NSC Alliance encourages the Joint Subcommittee on Ocean Science and Technology (JSOST) to work to ensure that the revised ocean research priorities plan includes appropriate policies and funding for natural science collections involved with the collection and curation of ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes specimens and data. Specifically, natural science collections should be identified as a “necessary tool” for implementing Theme 1, Stewardship of Natural and Cultural Ocean Resources, and Theme 5, Improving Ecosystem Health, of Charting the Course.

Additionally, the revised research plan should include long-term arrangements for the preservation and expansion of marine natural science collections. Given the hundreds of scientific collections held by more than a dozen federal agencies, as well as thousands of state, university, and other non-governmental collections, a government-wide approach will be needed. As noted by former OSTP Director John Marburger, III, “[r]obust interagency collaboration will remain vital as we develop a systematic approach to safeguarding these scientific treasures for future generations of scientists.” Therefore, NSC Alliance encourages JSOST to support the issuance of an executive order by President Obama promoting the preservation and use of science collections. I recently wrote to OSTP Director John Holdren about this issue and have included a copy of my letter along with these comments.

An executive order would help to institutionalize government planning to include all science collections. The Order would direct federal agencies whose actions may affect collections to identify those mechanisms 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 also establish a Federal Science Collections Council and a Science Collections Advisory Committee. The Council, with advice from the Advisory Committee, would be charged with developing a National Science Collections Plan within 18 months after the Order is issued and updating the plan periodically. These steps are critical to a unified approach to managing science collections and should enable considerable progress in the preservation, expansion, and accessibility of scientific collections.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to comment on Charting the Course. If you have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me or Dr. Robert Gropp, Director of Public Policy at 202-628-1500 x 250 or rgropp@aibs.org.

Sincerely,



William Y. Brown
President
Natural Science Collections Alliance