



NATURAL SCIENCE COLLECTIONS ALLIANCE

1444 I STREET NW SUITE 200 WASHINGTON, DC 20005 TEL: 202 628 1500 EXT:250 NSCALLIANCE.ORG

June 22, 2010

Ms. Ann Zulkosky
Professional Staff
Senate Subcommittee on Science and Space
428 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Scientific collections in the reauthorization of the America COMPETES Act

Dear Ms. Zulkosky:

The Natural Science Collections Alliance (NSC Alliance) strongly supports the draft legislative language recently provided to you by the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), an NSC Alliance member institution. NSC Alliance representatives worked with AMNH officials to draft this proposed change to Section 121 of the House-passed America COMPETES Act.

The 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. Our 100 institutional members 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.

Our nation's natural science collections, whether held by a federal agency, a museum, or a university science department, contain genetic, tissue, organism, environmental samples, and data that are a library of Earth's natural history. Moreover, these specimens and data drive cutting edge research on the significant challenges facing modern society.

Dr. Jonathan Coddington, associate director of research and collections at the National Museum of Natural History, recently testified before the House Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife about the Smithsonian's collections of marine biological specimens. As Dr. Coddington noted, these specimens represent a unique and now irreplaceable resource to

describe quantitatively the pre-spill Gulf of Mexico ecosystems. These collections document the biological diversity of the region prior to the oil spill, and will contribute to assessments of the spill's environmental impacts and will help to guide ecological restoration efforts.

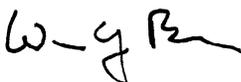
Beyond informing oil spill response and restoration, specimens and associated data held in our nation's natural science collections enable researchers to answer questions about the effects of climate change, the spread of invasive species and pathogens, and the loss of biological diversity and its effects on ecosystem function. In short, natural history collection specimens and data enable scientists and managers to develop the knowledge required to inform wise environmental, natural resource, and public health policy. Importantly, specimens and data that can inform this effort are found in federal and non-federal collection facilities.

For too many years, the federal government has failed to make an adequate or coordinated investment in natural science collections. It is also the case that policy governing the development and management of federal science collections can not be made in isolation from non-federal science collections. For instance, many federal collections are managed by non-federal facilities. Conversely, university-based scientists often require access to science collections maintained by federal agencies. Thus, it is important that the federal government not develop policy that could hinder the work of non-federal collections, scientists, and educators.

For these and other reasons, the NSC Alliance strongly supports the expansion of Section 121 as outlined in the sample language provided by AMNH. This language provides clarity and insures that the nation's scientific collections policy is developed in a coordinated fashion that includes appropriate stakeholders. The NSC Alliance is particularly supportive of the proposed new subsection "(g)", which would establish a "Science Collections Advisory Committee" to inform a coordinated and efficient use of federal and non-federal collections for research, education, and other matters.

I and other NSC Alliance members would be happy to discuss the importance of the proposed new Section 121 with you or members of the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee. Please do not hesitate to contact NSC Alliance director of public policy Dr. Robert Gropp at 202-628-1500 x 250 or rgropp@aibs.org if we may be of assistance to you.

Sincerely,



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