



NATURAL SCIENCE COLLECTIONS ALLIANCE

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March 2, 2018

Chairman Thad Cochran
United States Senate
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Vice Chairman Patrick J. Leahy
United States Senate
437 Russell Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Vice Chairman Leahy:

The Natural Science Collections Alliance (NSC Alliance) respectfully requests that you reject the President's fiscal year (FY) 2018 and 2019 budget requests for the United States Geological Survey (USGS). We also respectfully request that you reject the provisions in the Senate Subcommittee on Interior and Environment Appropriations provisions in the FY 2018 appropriations that would terminate the USGS Biological Sciences Unit and other important on-going research initiatives.

The administration's budget request for the USGS is will do significant and long-lasting damage to the nation's scientific research capacity, particularly with respect to the core biological sciences that are required for understanding how diseases spread between wild populations and humans, influence the productivity of our food crops, and sustain the vital ecosystem services that are responsible for our water and air quality.

Recently, a Washington Post article cited the false perception within the administration and among some congressional aides that the kind of scientific research conducted by USGS scientists affiliated with the Biological Sciences Unit at USGS is no longer cutting edge or valuable to the nation. This belief is simply wrong in an era of research on genomes, ct-scanning, and isotope analyses.

It is through our study of biological collections, such as those collected, curated, and studied by USGS biologists that we can validate which species live where, how they interact with each other, and how they interact with humanity. Of note, it was the ornithology collections at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History that were used to validate the bird species responsible for the bird-strike that resulted in US Airways flight 1549 emergency

landing on the Hudson River. The Department of Defense is supporting USGS biologists to study disease transmission from wildlife to military personnel in the field. Under the President's budget and the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee mark, the Biological Sciences Unit – the biologists that maintain and study the greatest collections of North American birds and mammals – would be eliminated.

Importantly, these globally important biological collections are key for identifying species and their geographic distribution. This information is required to appropriately model the potential spread of diseases, such as hanta virus, or any other disease that can be spread through human exposure to animal hosts.

Moreover, specimens held within collections continue to provide valuable insights into our world. Feathers or hair can be tested to understand whether a pollutant or toxin has been present in an area or at what levels it may have historically been present. Genetic and tissue samples can similarly be used to understand evolution of species, or how species may have responded to changing environmental conditions. These cuts are being proposed at a time when new scientific advances are being used to study these collections in ways unimaginable 25 years ago.

Even more fundamentally, it is these USGS positions that provide the access to biological specimens at the National Museum of Natural History from which scientists can validate the accuracy of species referenced in research publications or from which natural resource managers may determine the appropriateness of management decisions.

On behalf of the Natural Science Collections Alliance and our members, which include the leading natural history museums, botanic gardens and other biodiversity research centers across the nation, I encourage you to restore funding for the USGS and to direct the Department of the Interior to maintain its efforts with respect to biological research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "John Bates".

John Bates, Ph.D.
President

CC: Senate Committee on Appropriations