



Tulane University Museum of Natural History

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Tuesday, April 06, 2010

The Honorable Daniel Lipinski
Chairman
Subcommittee on Research and Science Education
Committee on Science and Technology
2321 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Vernon Ehlers
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Research and Science Education
Committee on Science and Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
394 Ford House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Lipinski and Ranking Member Ehlers:

I thank you for your efforts to reauthorize the America COMPETES Act and for the Subcommittee's recent hearings on the needs of our nation's research infrastructure. As your deliberations continue, I request that the Subcommittee include the nation's natural science collections in the legislation reauthorizing the America COMPETES Act.

As Director of the Tulane University Museum of Natural History and Curator of Fishes Royal D. Suttkus Fish Collection, research in my lab deals broadly with diversity of North American fishes. For 25 years, the museum has served as an invaluable resource for scientists and researchers studying the relationships of species, the branch of biology known as systematic, while the Tulane fish collection is the largest collection of post-larval fishes in the world. As a repository, cataloguer and curator of a wide variety of species, the museum takes much of the time and expense out of field work by supplying biologists with preserved specimens with which to work. Ongoing work at Tulane University includes studies of systematics, taxonomy, community ecology and life history of stream fishes, and responses of these and other fishes to environmental degradation.



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Natural science collections are an essential component of the nation's research and science education infrastructure. These collections consist of physical specimens and associated data that are preserved, catalogued, and managed by government agencies, universities, and other organizations. Natural science collections have been built through the collective work of generations of scientists and are irreplaceable records of earth history. In addition to contributing to fundamental research in all areas of science, natural science collections inform our understanding of and response to current problems, such as invasive species, earth systems response to climate change, or biodiversity discovery and conservation.

For many years, members of the scientific collections community have warned that a renewed national focus on the nation's scientific collections is needed. I support a proposal put forth by members the scientific community that encourages President Obama to promulgate an executive order to promote the preservation and use of scientific collections. The proposed order would establish a persistent and formalized federal structure to consider the needs of federal and non-federal science collections. To date the proposed executive order has not been issued, and I encourage the Subcommittee to include language in the COMPETES legislation that would establish a formalized federal structure to promote the preservation and use of scientific collections, federal and non-federal.

Thank you for your consideration of our request and for your efforts on behalf of our nation's scientific enterprise. Please feel free to contact me at hank@museum.tulane.edu or 504-394-1711.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Henry L. Bart, Jr.", written over a light gray rectangular background.

Henry L. Bart, Jr., Ph.D.
Director, Tulane University Museum of Natural History