

Workshop Report: Discussion Among NPS Research Coordinators and Curators of Ways to Improve Cooperation in Specimen Collecting and Curation

John G. Dennis, National Park Service, 1849 C Street, NW (2320), Washington, D.C., 20240; john_dennis@nps.gov

Ann Hitchcock, National Park Service, 1849 C Street, NW (2251), Washington, D.C., 20240; ann_hitchcock@nps.gov

In this workshop, approximately 20 National Park Service (NPS) research coordinators and curators engaged in a wide-ranging discussion of steps NPS could consider taking to improve management of natural resource collecting in parks and care of the resulting specimens. The desired outcome was to develop suggestions for best practices that could be applied to (1) improving the coordination within NPS of purposes, strategies, and activities for administering the collection and curation of natural history specimens; and (2) communicating these purposes, strategies, and activities to permit applicants and partner repositories. This workshop report provides a written compilation of the discussions.

The workshop leaders encouraged the group to identify:

- Key points in administration of collecting and curation of specimens where coordination among park curator, permit coordinator, permittee, and non-NPS repository is critical;
- Best practices where this coordination works well;
- Possible new practices to improve coordination;
- Follow-up tasks to promote best practices and to develop new practices for servicewide review; and
- Needs that are beyond what individual permit coordinators, permittees, curators, and repositories can do either separately or together, such as changes to statutory, regulatory, policy, or procedural guidance, and servicewide training programs.

The discussion produced the following suggestions.

Improve communication and information access through software changes:

- Facilitate export and import of data between the Automated National Catalog System (ANCS+) and NPSpecies, the NPS flora and fauna database. Consider inclusion of ANCS+ data in the NPS database-organizing program Synthesis. Note:

ANCS+ data, exported to NPSpecies, was some of the first data to populate NPSpecies in its early stages. NPSpecies developers are working on a routine to export NPSpecies data into ANCS+.

- Include additional data fields in the NPS Web Catalog to increase its usefulness to researchers. Note: Current natural history data fields in the Web Catalog are *taxonomic classification, scientific name, common name, collection date, collector, catalogue number, eminent figure and organization, and state*. The Web Catalog provides images of specimens, but does not include locality data, which parks must protect and release on a case-by-case basis. Additional data fields are under consideration.
- Improve coordination between the park curator and permit coordinator by identifying the curator in the Research Permit and Reporting System (RPRS) and having RPRS send an automated message to the curator when an applicant proposes to collect specimens that will be retained. Note: A RPRS work group also recommended this modification. The recommendation is being implemented; the software now displays the park curator's e-mail address on the park research coordinator's home

Current Topics in Natural History Collecting and Collections

page, includes the curator's e-mail address in park information provided to research applicants, and triggers an automated message to the park curator when an investigator submits an application proposing a non-NPS repository for collected specimens.

- Modify RPRS to allow identification of all project personnel, including those who collect specimens. Note: Currently, RPRS allows identification of one principal investigator and unlimited numbers of co-investigators. The system does not allow multiple principal investigators for two reasons: NPS needs to identify a single responsible research official, and the principal investigator is a key link to other fields in the database.
- Improve guidance on the researcher's collections management responsibilities. Develop an instructional CD-ROM to explain the step-by-step process for researchers to meet collections management requirements, including working with the park curator and research coordinator, completing repository agreements and other requirements in RPRS, preparing specimens, and exporting or entering ANCS+ data. Modify RPRS to prompt permit applicants to supply required collections-related information. In order to facilitate tracking of specimens, consider assigning an accession number to each permit for specimens to be retained. Note: Modifications to include researcher prompts in the online RPRS process have been made and the suggestion regarding the accession number is under consideration. A distance-learning program is also under consideration.

Increase communication among key players in permitting and collections management:

- Involve park curators at the earliest stages in processing applications that involve collecting specimens for permanent retention.
- Ask NPS regional and support office curators to provide park curators and research coordinators with increased technical sup-

port and facilitate coordination with non-NPS partners in the museum community.

Augment central NPS staffing to guide NPS natural history collections management:

- Provide curatorial support at the inventory and monitoring network level.
- Establish a service-wide curator in natural history. Note: The museum management and inventory and monitoring programs jointly have established a position to be filled in 2003.

Facilitate partnership arrangements:

- Establish a generic cooperative agreement for parks, networks, regions, and Washington to use in establishing relationships with one or more non-NPS repositories. Note: A draft is under review.
- Seek recurring funding to support non-NPS repositories managing park collections.
- Place NPS curators at partner repositories.

Clarify, update, and disseminate guidance for NPS specimen acquisition and management:

- Consider whether the significance of a specimen should factor into a park's decision to acquire it.
- Update the NPS Museum Handbook, Appendix H, Natural History, to include new or revised guidance on managing DNA and tissue samples, tracking consumption of specimens, and researcher submission of resource management records or archival copies. Note: These updates will occur after the museum management program fills the natural history curator position (see above).
- Respond to repository requests for NPS to convey ownership of specimens.
- Update the taxonomic classification system (hierarchical classification outline) in ANCS+. Note: This update will occur after the museum management program fills the natural history curator position.

Make quality improvements to management:

Current Topics in Natural History Collecting and Collections

- Consider establishing a servicewide annual report on repository loans and agreements by collecting this information from parks.
 - Consider adopting protocols for peer review of permit applications and study proposals.
 - Consider developing databases equivalent to NPSpecies for geological and paleontological resources.
 - Provide centralized reference to park-specific and project-specific permit conditions.
 - Provide training to park and network staff on collecting and collections management procedures. Note: The programs that manage RPRS and ANCS+ provide training throughout NPS when introducing new systems or modifications. A distance-learning program on permitting and collecting natural history specimens is under consideration.
 - Identify funding within the inventory and monitoring program to compensate permittees who provide collecting and collections management services to parks in conjunction with their own independent research.
- Workshop members offered a wealth of ideas for parks, networks, and servicewide programs to consider. Many of the recommendations pertain to enhancements to servicewide automated systems and guidance coordinated by the museum management program and inventory and monitoring program of the Natural Resource Information Division. The programs have these recommendations for consideration, as appropriate, in planning.

