



Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability
ATTN: Facility Closure
703 Stratton Building
Springfield, IL 62706

June 26, 2015

Dear Sir, Madam,

The Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections (SPNHC) is an international organization that represents natural history collection care professionals and the collections they serve to protect. As a Society, we are concerned with the care of natural history collections – well-curated collections are a critical foundation for scientific research and education. Natural history collections also house unique specimens of species that no longer exist from habitats that no longer exist.

The Society is deeply concerned over recent reports regarding the closure of the Illinois State Museum due to state budgetary considerations. We are especially concerned over the fate of the museum's collections and staff and thereby a significant reduction in accessibility to these collections for researchers.

The Illinois State Museum holds many millions of specimens and artifacts in trust, not solely for Illinois and its citizens, but for the needs and betterment of global biodiversity science. This collection houses unique materials not found in collections elsewhere and of great scientific value. In addition to maintaining 150,000 Midwestern zoological specimens, ISM protects over 200,000 paleontological specimens from Mazon Creek and other Midwestern sites including nationally significant Pleistocene mammal collections and the Boney Spring assemblage from the western Ozarks, which is the largest assemblage of American Mastodons from a single site. The ISM is a lead institution for the NSF-funded Neotoma Paleoecology Database. This international collaborative database serves the North American Pollen Database, FAUNMAP (Quaternary mammal distribution) and other datasets documenting the paleontological record in North America and elsewhere. Neotoma and its constituent databases are an important research component of species distributions, paleo-environments, and climate change.

Materials are loaned from these collections to researchers world-wide for discovery and scientific publication. A fragile and finite resource, collections require continual specialized care and upkeep. Access to specimens and data by researchers is imperative

in order to realize the scientific potential a collection holds. Curatorial staff need access to the collection to ensure that it is well maintained and well curated. Any decision to restrict access, even temporarily, greatly increases the risk of serious damage, and even permanent loss of specimens and artifacts.

The Illinois State Museum is part of a global collections network and has an enviable reputation for collections care. The museum, as part of a statewide consortium of 12 museums, libraries and archives, recently received a highly competitive Institute of Museum and Library Service (IMLS) grant to develop educational resources and provide training in collections care.

A decision to close the collections not only affects research and puts specimens at risk, it also hinders the Museum's ability to create public exhibition and education programs that draw on them. The result is a loss in institutional prestige. Any short-term financial gain will have a long-term negative impact on the reputation of the Museum as a scientific institution. Any short term gain in revenue gained by closing the museum pales in comparison to the revenue generated by the museum through visitors and scientific endeavor.

For this reason, while we understand and sympathize with the fiscal challenges facing the Illinois State, we would urge you to implement plans that ensure that the Illinois State Museum remains open and funded.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andrew Bentley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Andrew Bentley
President
Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections

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