



North Carolina Museum Of Natural Sciences

POLICY

Policy #

Naturalist Center Collections Management Policy

Date Enacted: 4/28/2016

Section(s): *Community Engagement*

Naturalist Center Collections Management Policy

The following policy outlines protocols, procedures, and guidelines related to the natural sciences collection maintained by the Naturalist Center within the Community Engagement Section of the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences (NCMNS).

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I. Organizational Context

The North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences (NCMNS) is a science museum with the institutional mission to illuminate the interdependence of nature and humanity. The Community Engagement Section, an organizational section of the NCMNS, was created to maximize the Museum's reach and positive impacts on the wider community by focusing efforts to better understand, involve, attract, welcome, engage, and re-engage both traditional and nontraditional audiences. The Naturalist Center is housed within the Community Engagement Section of the NCMNS.

In accordance with the overall mission statement of the NCMNS and the objectives of the Community Engagement Section, the mission of the Naturalist Center is to provide the citizens of North Carolina access to a comprehensive natural science collection emphasizing the flora, fauna, and geology of the state of North Carolina and the southeastern United States while demonstrating the value of research collections and how they are used in scientific research.

To accomplish this mission, the Naturalist Center houses a collection of natural science objects accessible to both school groups and the general public. The main Naturalist Center collection is located in the Nature Research Center in downtown Raleigh, North Carolina. A smaller collection of specimens is housed in the Whiteville Branch of the NCMNS in Whiteville, North Carolina. Disciplines represented in the collection include vascular plants, fungi, moss and moss relatives, insects and other arthropods, mollusks, fishes, reptiles and amphibians, birds, mammals, rocks and minerals, and fossils. The flora and fauna of North Carolina and the southeastern United States are emphasized.

The Naturalist Center is staffed by two full-time scientists: a Coordinator and Curator. The Coordinator is responsible for managing the daily operations of the Naturalist Center and serves as supervisor to the Curator. It is the primary responsibility of the Curator to ensure that the Naturalist Center's collection is cared for and maintained in accordance to the best practices and policies detailed in this document.

The Naturalist Center collection is managed separately from the larger Research Collections maintained by the NCMNS Research & Collections Section. However, all specimens are prepared, cataloged, and managed according to the standards of the NCMNS Research & Collections Section. As such, the Naturalist Center Collections Management Policy was adapted from the Museum Research Collections Policy developed by the NCMNS Research & Collections Section (available at: <http://naturalsciences.org/research-collections/collections>). These policies were developed to reflect the best practices as set forth by the American



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Association of Museums (AAM, 2008). The Naturalist Center Collections Management Policy is freely available and accessible on the Naturalist Center page of the NCMNS website (<http://naturalsciences.org/learn/naturalist-center>).

II. Acquisitions and Accessions

Any new material arriving in the Naturalist Center must first be offered to the appropriate NCMNS Research & Collections unit (R&C units are staffed by a team of a Research Curator and a Collection Manager) for inclusion into the Research Collections. If the specimen/object does not meet the criteria for acceptance into the Research Collections, then the object may be added to the Naturalist Center collection once it has been determined that:

- The object fills a current gap in the Naturalist Center collection.
- The material serves to fulfill the mission statement of the Naturalist Center.
- The Naturalist Center can reasonably provide the appropriate processing, storage, protection, and preservation of the object.
- The materials were obtained in conformity with all applicable international, national, state, and/or local laws and regulations.

Unrestricted Gifts

Members of the public may bring specimens/objects to the Naturalist Center for identification by the Naturalist Center staff. If the Naturalist Center staff cannot identify the object in a reasonable time, the item may be left with the NCMNS until it can be positively identified. The item will be treated as a temporary deposit for 30 days under the policies set forth in Section VI of this document. If the object is not recovered by the requester within 30 days the object will be considered an unrestricted gift to the NCMNS.

Documentation

A Gift/Donation Form, obtained from the Naturalist Center staff, must be completed when accepting new material into the Naturalist Center collection. Documentation must include an adequate description of all of the specimens/objects and the conditions of transfer. The document must be signed by the donor and either the Coordinator or the Curator of the Naturalist Center.

A Request for Identification Form, obtained from the Naturalist Center staff, must be completed if a visitor requests to have a specimen/object identified by the NCMNS staff. This form contains a clause which states: *"I understand that it is my responsibility to claim these objects within 30 days from the date below and I confirm that any objects unclaimed at the end of that 30-day period are to be considered unrestricted gifts to the Museum."* The requester must sign the Request for Identification Form, acknowledging that they have read and understand the terms of the agreement.



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III. Care and Control

Curation, maintenance, and stewardship of the Naturalist Center Collection are the primary responsibilities of the Curator of the Naturalist Center. Because professional standards and practices vary considerably among the scientific disciplines represented in the Naturalist Center collection discipline-specific policies have been developed that are consistent with this document and the NCMNS Research Collections Policy.

New Materials

All newly acquired biological specimens that have the potential to harbor insect pests must be fumigated prior to entrance into the Naturalist Center collection. Fumigation of specimens is performed in an airtight container located on the Museum's loading dock. Alternatively, specimens may be placed in a freezer located in the Naturalist Center for a duration of three weeks.

Inspections

Most cabinets containing specimens are examined daily during the normal operations of the Naturalist Center. More thorough inspections are completed monthly. Monthly inspections involve checking for dust, damage, and insect frass in all drawers containing biological material. Proper labeling and placement of specimens is also checked. The fluid levels of all wet collections are checked and topped off as necessary. The Naturalist Center is closed on Mondays to accommodate inspections and maintenance of the collection. All observations and actions taken are recorded in a Collections Maintenance Log.

IV. Inventory and Data Management

When an object enters the Naturalist Center collection it is given a NTRL number (i.e., catalog number) and a data tag is attached to the object. All pertinent data is recorded on the tag using archival quality ink and paper. Data is entered as completely and accurately as possible into an electronic database using Microsoft Excel. Database files are backed up in at least three locations (i.e., external hard drive, desktop computer, and internal NCMNS network). Ultimately, the entirety of the Naturalist Center collection will be made available online at the following location: <http://collections.naturalsciences.org/searchNaturalist.aspx>

All requests for identification, donation, accession, and loan forms are recorded on hard copy and filed in the appropriate location within the Naturalist Center. Digital copies of these documents are made and archived for later use.



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V. Access and Use

The Naturalist Center is open to the public at least six days a week (typically Tuesday through Sunday). Any member of the general public may enter the Naturalist Center during the normal hours of operations on these days.

All persons over the age of 12 are admitted into the Naturalist Center without parental supervision. Children under the age of eight are prohibited from entering the main aisles of the collection. The number of people in the room should never exceed 45 individuals.

Visitors may access the Naturalist Center collections after they have received an orientation. Visitors may view all of the objects in the Naturalist Center and are allowed to touch many of the specimens in the room. Specimens that can be touched must be handled properly. Should a visitor deliberately ignore the guidelines outlined in the orientation they will be denied future access to the Naturalist Center.

Only pre-designated cabinets are opened during business hours. Should a visitor wish to view an object that is located in a locked cabinet, they may do so with the assistance of the Naturalist Center staff. Once the visitor has finished viewing the item the cabinet should be closed and locked.

VI. Loans

Incoming Loans

Incoming loans to the Naturalist Center are accepted only for purposes of exhibition or education. All loan agreements must conform to the standards set forth in the NCMNS Museum Research Collections Policy. The Naturalist Center will accept on loan only materials that:

- were acquired or collected in conformity with all applicable international, national, state, and/or local laws and regulations; and
- were collected in a manner that does not cause significant damage to, or destruction of, natural habitat, biotic populations, significant geological, historical, or cultural sites, or human burial places.

Incoming loans must be accompanied by a written agreement between the lender and the Naturalist Center staff member receiving the loan.

Objects may be left in temporary custody of the Naturalist Center staff for identification, examination as a public service, or as a possible gift, purchase, or loan. The Naturalist Center will accept only objects for temporary deposit that:



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- were acquired or collected ethically and legally, in conformity with all applicable international, national, state, and/or local laws and regulations; and
- were not collected in a manner that would cause significant damage to, or destruction of, habitat, biotic populations, significant geological, historical, or cultural sites, or to human burial places.

Outgoing Loans

Outgoing loans are typically granted only to NCMNS staff. However, outgoing loans may be made to reputable schoolteachers, students, and environmental educators at the discretion of the Coordinator and Curator of the Naturalist Center.

All loans require appropriate documentation through completion of a Loan Form. This form may be obtained from the Naturalist Center staff. The Loan Form details the nature of the loan, name of the individual/institution receiving the loan, and the terms of the loan agreement. A copy of the signed Loan Form is provided to the borrower. The original form is stored for future reference.

Should an individual fail to meet the terms of the loan agreement, future loan requests by that individual may be denied. If a specimen suffers damage while on loan, the circumstances surrounding the damage will be investigated by Naturalist Center staff, who will then make a decision whether the individual may receive future loans.

Overdue Loans

Overdue loans are specimens and materials not returned to the Naturalist Center within the time period stipulated in the original loan agreement. The Naturalist Center will periodically send letters to the borrower requesting the return of overdue loans until the specimens and materials of the loan are returned.

VII. Deaccessions

Objects should be retained as long as physical integrity, authenticity, and/or usefulness to the NCMNS remains intact. However, deaccessioning is indicated when:

- the object is no longer appropriate for the intent and purpose of the NCMNS;
- preservation of the object is no longer practical;
- the object's utility in the foreseeable future is dubious; or



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- the object has been documented as missing for at least 3 years or is known to have been lost or stolen

In the event that the Curator of the Naturalist Center has determined that deaccession is appropriate for an object, he/she will discuss with the Coordinator on the appropriate course of action. If the material has significant monetary value, the Naturalist Center staff will confer with members of the NCMNS Research & Collections section to collectively decide the fate of the object. If necessary, the item will be referred to a Deaccession Review Committee as detailed in the NCMNS Museum Research Collections Policy.

Documentation of conditions and circumstances under which objects are deaccessioned and disposed of will be retained. Disposition of objects in the Naturalist Center collection must be accomplished in a manner considered in the best interest of the NCMNS, the public it serves, the public trust it represents, and the scholarly or cultural community of which it forms a part.

An object may be discarded or destroyed occasionally. Physical disposal or destruction must be witnessed, and witness names and the date and manner of disposal must be recorded.

VIII. Ethical Standards

NCMNS subscribes to the ethical guidelines of the American Association of Museums (AAM), the North Carolina Museums Council, and those of other associations pertinent to the disciplines represented in the NCMNS.

Staff members are to act legally and ethically in collecting, acquiring, lending, borrowing, transporting, disposing of, and caring for specimens.

NCMNS staff members are discouraged from forming or expanding personal collections in scientific disciplines included in NCMNS collections. In the case of potential conflict, a staff member may be asked to demonstrate that the possibility of competition with NCMNS does not exist.

Staff members are prohibited from providing monetary appraisals of specimens/objects.

Objects removed from nature by participants on NCMNS-sponsored research or interpretive field trips will not be retained in private collections unless justified and approved by a Section Chief before collection occurs.



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IX. Revisions to the Policy

This document will be reviewed every 5 years to ensure conformance with prevailing standards of the NCMNS Management Team and any other relevant bodies (e.g., AAM). All revisions will be approved by the NCMNS Management Team.

X. References

American Association of Museums. 2008. National standards and best practices. American Association of Museums, Washington, DC. 92 pp.

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Date	New Version Number	Changes	Authors