

North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences Online Collections

Collections Policy

I. INTRODUCTION

The North Carolina State Museum of Natural Sciences (NCSM) studies, and encourages the study of, the natural history of North Carolina, the Eastern United States, and other geographic areas. To accomplish this mission the Museum must acquire, retain and manage natural history specimens (collections) and preserve these materials for future generations. It is the responsibility of Section Directors to implement procedures that ensure proper development and maintenance for collections and associated records under their care.

II. DEFINITIONS

"Collections" are natural history specimens and related materials (documentation) acquired and preserved for scientific, cultural, and educational value. "Specimens and related materials" includes live and preserved animals, replicas, artifacts, photographs, paintings, scientific illustrations, catalogs, field and lab notes, letters, maps, and exhibit materials.

Research Collections include live animals being held pending completion of research projects, specimens preserved and stored in concert with the standards of the appropriate discipline, and supporting documentation (maps, photographs, drawings, field notes, correspondence, etc.). Libraries of reference and research- related documents are also maintained, as well as originals of scientific illustrations produced for NCSM research staff and associates.

Teaching collections, maintained by the School and/or Public Programs Section, contain a variety of live animals, replicas and preserved materials used in interpretive programs.

Transaction records, defined as official, permanent documents relating to transfer of title, provenance (history), condition, accession, loan, or deaccession of an object represent formal documents of agreement. Bound catalogs provide a chronology for accessions and loans, and printed forms document and track all accessions, loans, and deaccessions. Correspondence and specimen-associated documents (e.g. permits) are also considered transaction records.

III. CARE AND CONTROL

Research Collection curation and maintenance is the primary responsibility of the Research and Collections Section curators. The Director of Research and Collections is ultimately responsible for the scientific collections, but he/she may delegate direct responsibility for these collections to other personnel. The Senior Curator of Mammals is responsible for the collection of scientific illustrations.

Teaching Collection care and maintenance is the responsibility of the School and/or Public Programs Director.

Transaction records are currently maintained by the Research and Collections Director who delegates care and maintenance responsibilities for them. NCSM currently has no "Registrar" position.

Because professional standards and practices vary considerably among disciplines represented at NCSM, specific policies for the various disciplines may be necessary. When discipline specific issues arise, policies developed must be consistent with the intent of NCSM's basic collection policy.

IV. ACCESS

Preservation and use are the objectives of collections management. "Use" includes scientific study, public access and exhibition, including form altering and consumptive activities (e.g. dissection, chemical analysis). Because improper use can seriously compromise the integrity of a collection, access must be regulated.

Research collection access is normally restricted to examination and study by the scientific community. Individual Research and Collections Unit policies provide detailed discussion of each collection's accessibility. In general:

Collections are accessible for study by legitimate researchers during established office hours. Curators- in charge establish procedures for access to Unit collections. As appropriate use may sometimes require irreversible alteration or total destruction (e.g. DNA extraction, dissection), such use must be balanced by the potential importance of information gained. Research curators administering each collection will consider the impact of proposed uses and make decisions accordingly. When no staff curator in-charge is available, the Director of Research and Collections must give final approval for alteration or consumption of NCSM materials.

Curators in charge are responsible for all research collections material and approve their use for exhibit or public programs.

Use of Research and Collections materials in exhibits requires the development of guidelines for interpretive use; interpretive statements require review and approval by the Research and Collections Unit curator-in charge prior to installation.

When relevant, Directors of Exhibits, School Programs, or Public Programs are responsible for ascertaining that display environments containing objects from the Research Collections conform to, and are maintained at, accepted museum standards for conservation and security.

Teaching Collection objects are generally accessible and subject to consumption. These materials are available to NCSM staff, trained volunteers (docents), and others at the discretion of NCSM permanent staff.

Transaction records access is restricted to the staff of the Research and Collections Section. Outside inquiries regarding accession and disposition records will be routed to the Director of Research and Collections, or to the Museum Director, for review.

V. ACQUISITION POLICY

Collections growth and development priorities are integral components of the Museum's long range planning. It is the policy of NCSM to rely upon the competence and judgment of its Research Curators concerning scientific relevance and utility of material in their collections, and of objects proposed for acquisition or disposition. Research and Collections curators develop priorities for the growth and development of the systematic collections; Public and/or School program section personnel develop priorities for materials used for interpretation, exhibition, and public presentation.

Specimens destined for sections other than Research and Collections must be examined by an appropriate Research Curator to ensure that materials of scientific value are not subjected to inappropriate use.

Specimens may be obtained by field collection, donation, transfer, permanent loan, or purchase. Research materials are accepted on authority of the Research Curators; the Public and/or School Programs Director(s) bear responsibility for acquisitions to the Teaching Collections.

Acceptance of specimens requires approval and documentation. Objects may be accepted for the collections once it has been determined that:

The objects fit priorities developed by the appropriate collections representatives.

NCSM can reasonably provide for appropriate process, storage, protection, and preservation of the materials.

The materials were obtained in conformity with all applicable international, national, state, and local laws and regulations.

NCSM will acquire legal title to the material(s) without restriction. Materials occasionally may be received, however, from agencies prohibited from relinquishing legal title (e.g. National Parks, USFWS) or with restrictions or limitations; acquisition of such material must be approved by the Museum Director and, if necessary, an Acquisitions Committee (see below). Conditions under which such a transfer is made must be clearly stated in the instrument of conveyance.

Unit representatives should discuss proposed acquisitions with the Section Director if:

Processing or housing the material will significantly affect Museum operations

Purchasing from, or exchanging with, a private collector is involved

Transferring ownership of the material creates a question of legality or propriety

Replacing the material, either as a single item or in the aggregate, will cost more than \$10,000, or if any single item in the acquisition has a market value greater than \$1,000.

Acquisitions Committee. At times an Acquisitions Committee may be required to review a proposed donation for appropriateness. The Acquisitions Committee will be minimally composed of the Museum Director, the Director of Administration, the Registrar or his/her substitute, a relevant Section Director, and the NCSM curator or staff member who will bear ultimate responsibility for the proposed acquisition. This committee will decide acceptance or rejection of questionable material.

Documentation. Legal instruments of conveyance will be filed with the Transaction Records. Documentation must include adequate descriptions of all objects and the conditions of transfer; each document must be signed by the donor and an authorized museum representative.

Accession documentation should be processed no later than 78 hours after the objects are accepted for transfer to the NCSM. The accession process includes entering pertinent information in a logbook and completing standard forms that describe the conditions and circumstances under which objects were obtained. Completed documents should be submitted to the Research and Collections Director or to the Registrar in a timely manner.

Accession documents will be filed in order by accession number, and a cross-reference file will be maintained so that donations can be located by accession number or donor's name.

Because NCSM currently has no Registrar position, all acquisition records are examined, before filing, by the Director of Research and Collections. The Museum Director will review all acquisition records on an annual basis.

VI. LOANS

Loans are accepted only for purposes of research, exhibition, or education. Permanent Research and Collections staff are authorized to borrow materials necessary for research purposes; relevant curators in charge, or the Director of Research and Collections, must authorize (in writing) the use of NCSM facilities by non-permanent staff who may need to borrow materials through NCSM. The Museum Director and other Program Section staff authorize exhibit and education loan requests. NCSM will accept on loan only materials:

Acquired or collected in conformity with all applicable international, national, state, and local laws and regulations, and

Collected in a manner that does not cause damage to, or destruction of, biota, significant geological, historical, or cultural sites, or human burial places.

NCSM staff may accept an object of uncertain history on loan only with approval of the Museum Director.

No indefinite or long term loans will be accepted unless authorized by the Museum Director. Materials not claimed by the lender will convert to NCSM after seven (7) years if NCSM has given sufficient notice to the lender, and if the lender has not made an action to reclaim the loan within those seven years.

Objects loaned to NCSM with an understanding that they will be donated to the collections must be accompanied by written declaration to this effect. Should the lender decide not to act in accordance with this declaration, the cost of insurance, curation, and storage during the retention period must be borne by the lender.

Incoming Loans must be accompanied by a written agreement between the lender and the NCSM staff member requesting the loan. The lending institution must notify NCSM, in writing, of all terms and conditions governing a loan.

NCSM will not clean, repair, restore, or alter in any way objects it has received on loan without the express written approval of the lending institution.

Copies or original material will not be reproduced without written permission from the legal owner.

Outgoing Loans of materials for scholarly research, exhibition and education are subject to the policies and practices established within

each Section. Borrowers will not transfer possession, clean, repair, restore, or alter in any way NCSM loan materials without prior written approval. NCSM material will not be reproduced without written permission from the relevant Research Curator, the Director of Research and Collections, the appropriate Programs Director or the Museum Director. In general:

Loans are made only to qualified institutions.

Loans are made to individuals only under special circumstances, and only with prior approval from the relevant Section Director. Before lending to an individual, NCSM representatives and potential borrowers must make every effort to seek institutional affiliation or endorsement. When affiliation is not possible to establish, then a written explanation for deviation from policy must be included with the loan documentation.

Loans requested by students require faculty signature or other institutional endorsement.

Loans will be for a specified period of time, not to exceed one year. Loan periods may be extended only with approval from the NCSM unit curator who granted permission for the original loan.

Loans for in house use must be approved and documented as any other loan.

All loans require written agreement between borrower and NCSM. It is the responsibility of the NCSM employee authorizing the loan to notify the borrower of the loan's terms and conditions. That NCSM employee is also responsible for recording the transaction under procedures established by the respective Units.

Research Loans will not be insured from loss unless the lender/borrower specifically requests such coverage. Employees negotiating loans are responsible for packing/unpacking, preparing condition reports, and shipping all loans for the Research and Collections Section.

Exhibit and Education Loans are considered for insurance on a case by case basis but NCSM does not generally require insurance for loans of Teaching Collection materials. The appropriate Programs Director is responsible for delegating responsibility for packing/unpacking, preparing condition reports and shipping for all loans of exhibit and education materials.

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

Were acquired or collected ethically and legally, in conformity with all applicable international, national, state, and local laws and regulations, and

Were not collected in a manner that would cause damage to, or destruction of, biota, significant geological, historical, or cultural sites, or to human burial places.

NCSM may accept on deposit an object of uncertain history only with approval from the Museum Director.

A document describing terms of agreement and duration of custody must be issued for all objects left in custody of NCSM; documents must be signed by an NCSM representative and by the individual leaving the object. In cases of uncertain history the Museum Director's signature is required as well.

NCSM will not insure objects left in temporary custody.

NCSM will not transfer possession, clean, repair, restore, or alter in any way objects left in temporary custody without express written approval from the depositor.

NCSM will not reproduce materials left in temporary custody without written permission from the legal owner of the materials.

VII. DEACCESSIONS

Deaccessioning will be undertaken for the sole purpose of advancing the quality and preservation of the collections. Generally, objects should be retained as long as their physical integrity, authenticity, and/or usefulness to the museum remains intact. When:

The object is no longer appropriate for the intent and purpose of the Museum,

An absence of documentation, or inadequate documentation, critically reduces the utility of the object,

The object fails to retain its identity, authenticity, or integrity,

Preservation of the object is no longer practical,

The object's utility in the foreseeable future is dubious, or

The object has been documented as missing for at least 3 years or is known to have been stolen, deaccessioning is indicated.

Deaccessioning includes four basic activities: determination of status, approval, documentation and disposition.

Museum materials fall into two general status categories: exempt and non-exempt. Exempt materials are those materials not recorded in the catalogues of the Research and Collections Section. In general, these materials require less scrutiny prior to deaccessioning. Non exempt materials are well-documented materials deposited with, and recorded within the catalogues of, the Research and Collections Section. Deaccession of non-exempt materials requires considerable scrutiny.

Prior to deaccession of any object, NCSM representatives must ascertain that NCSM holds legal title to that object.

Approval for disposition, exchange or transfer of exempt objects may be granted by the Section Director.

When an appropriate NCSM representative has determined that deaccession is appropriate for a non-exempt object, he or she will submit a proposal to the Section Director who will review and submit the original proposal with his or her recommendation to the Museum Director. If the material as a single item has a value greater than \$1000, or in the aggregate has a replacement value greater than \$10,000, the collection representative, Section Director and Museum Director will collectively decide whether the proposed deaccession warrants referral to a Deaccessions Review Committee.

Deaccession Review Committee members will vary to accommodate differing requirements of the varying disciplines and collections represented in the NCSM, but will be minimally composed of the Museum Director, the relevant Section Director, the NCSM staff member proposing the deaccession, and two additional knowledgeable NCSM staff or associates to be selected by the Section Director. This committee will utilize recommendations from the NCSM staff member proposing the deaccession as the basis for making its decision. Final approval for deaccession of non exempt objects must be granted by the Museum Director in writing.

Documentation of conditions and circumstances under which objects are deaccessioned and disposed of will be retained as part of the Transaction Records. Recording deaccession of non-exempt material in the appropriate Research and Collections catalogue will be required for each Unit collection.

Disposition of objects must be accomplished in a manner considered in the best interest of the NCSM, the public it serves, the public trust it represents, and the scholarly or cultural community of which it forms a part. Preference will be given to using the object in NCSM interpretive programs. If the object is not appropriate for internal use, consideration will be given to placing the object, through transfer, exchange, or sale, with another not for profit institution.

Neither non exempt nor exempt objects will be given, exchanged, or sold to NCSM employees, or to members of the governing authority of NCSM or its representatives.

Sale at public auction, if consistent with state policy and Museum ethics guidelines, may be considered. Sale should be considered after all other options have been explored, and undertaken only under the following conditions:

The Museum should neither create nor contribute to creating a market for natural history specimens. Vertebrate fossils and archaeological objects should never be sold.

All sales must take place at an advertised public auction or in the public market place. No sales of deaccessioned materials will be made through the Museum's support group (the Friends) or through the Museum Store.

All proceeds from the sale of objects will be used for collections enhancement.

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 in the Transaction Records.

VIII. ETHICAL STANDARDS

NCSM subscribes to the ethical guidelines of the American Association of Museums, the Association of Systematics Collections, the North Carolina Museums Council and those of other associations pertinent to the disciplines represented in the NCSM.

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

Staff is discouraged from forming or expanding personal collections in areas within the realm of NCSM collections. In the case of potential conflict, a staff member may be asked to demonstrate that the possibility of competition with NCSM does not exist.

Staff are prohibited from providing appraisals.

Transfer of ownership, whether or not for payment, of any collection materials from the NCSM to a member of its staff is prohibited.

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

IX. PALEONTOLOGY ADDENDUM AND FORMS

Paleontology Policy Addendum ([docs/NCSM Paleontology Collections Policy.pdf](#))

Imaging Request Form ([docs/NCSM Paleo Imaging Request Form.pdf](#))

Destructive Analysis Request Form ([docs/NCSM Paleo Destructive Analysis Request Form.pdf](#))

X. REVISIONS TO THE POLICY

This document will be reviewed every 2 years to insure conformance with prevailing standards of museum management. All revisions will be approved by the Management Team.