

Collections Policies

Sternberg Museum of Natural History COLLECTIONS POLICY

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1. INTRODUCTION

The holdings in collections at the Sternberg Museum of Natural History (FHSM) represent a crucial part of the Museum's mission. This policy is intended to ensure the best care and use of collections to aid researchers, make the best use of finite space, conserve sensitive specimens, effectively provide quality educational displays and programs for our community, and strengthen focus areas.

The Collections Policy here applies to acquiring, processing, and caring for collections specimens, and conforms to the FHSM [Code of Ethics](#) and [Museum's mission](#). A variety of forms are used to implement the policy issues outlined here, as well as a Curation Guidelines document for use with each separate collection.

This policy supplements and may extend federal and state guidelines, and in turn may be supplemented but not superseded by special considerations or specific agreements among curation partners, new legislation, or agency regulations. FHSM adheres to the spirit of guidelines put forth by the AAM and ICOM and its partner agencies at federal and state levels.

2. INTENT AND AREAS OF EMPHASIS

FHSM stands in the midst of innumerable important fossil localities. The Great Plains of the U.S. abounds with a rich diversity of animals and plants. Our collections reflect the abundance and importance of these resources. We hold numerous type-specimens and others invaluable to evolutionary, ecological, and paleoecological research, as well as some of the continent's finest visual examples of ancient life. Our collections reflect the Museum's primary purpose in representing and interpreting the record of regional natural history and prehistory.

FHSM collections are arranged into natural history thematic groups, each including distinct taxa of specimens. Collections include modern flora and fauna as well as fossils collected throughout the region, supplemented by rock and mineral specimens. Each thematic group includes permanent collections. The collections contain a few specimens repositied from state and federal lands. Whether owned outright or repositied for public agencies, each has accessioned, documented, and cataloged specimens of scientific significance, of high quality, and representative of our mission. These collections are used for research, exhibitions, and loans.

Additionally, specimens not of scientific significance, and specimens of lower quality but still representative of the diversity inherent in our mission, are held in Education Collections. These collections are used in educational settings inside the FHSM or at other locations for educational programming. They are owned by FHSM for this purpose and are therefore treated with somewhat more latitude than permanent collections. Commonly collected fossils, cast reproductions, durable geologic samples, biologic specimens of non-research quality, and specimens lacking locality data are placed in this group, where they can achieve the most utility to our mission.

In our geological collections, we emphasize specimens from formations found in Kansas. Rocks and minerals with comparative value for educational and research purposes are also included. Paleontological focus areas span important geologic intervals and faunas/floras, especially emphasizing the Cretaceous formations of the Western Interior Seaway as well as the later Miocene Ogallala Group and Pleistocene deposits. These areas of emphasis bear most on our mission, in that specimens are most prolific as well as most important in scientific and educational terms.

Natural history collections emphasize the flora and fauna of the Great Plains of the U.S., though specimens around the world may be collected for comparative purposes or curator research emphasis.

We do not emphasize Anglo/European history, art, or industry; therefore, historical specimens in these categories do not have a place in our Museum collections. Exceptions to this policy are items of art that have a strong natural history component or items that may be part of an archived exhibit.

3. DOCUMENTATION

Required documentation will differ according to the nature of the collection. Each specimen must have proper documentation for its category and in the case of donations, the donor must be able to show legitimate ownership and proof of legal collection.

If the specimens have been previously displayed or studied, a copy of the professional papers or exhibit catalogs on the collection or item is required. For vertebrate fossils, the following guidelines apply: we support the laws of federal and state government prohibiting the collection of vertebrate fossils from federal and state lands. In cases where vertebrate fossils can be documented to have been collected legally from public lands, the Museum may choose to accept these fossils into our collections. Specimens must also be accompanied by precise locality information. Undocumented specimens and/or specimens without locality information will not be accepted into the permanent collections.

For ethical and legal reasons FHSM does not provide any documentation granting formal appraisals, especially to prospective donors.

4. ACQUISITIONS

FHSM acquires collections specimens through field collection by staff and volunteers, private donations, purchases, and collections from state and federal lands. Research collection items must be designated formally as such and placed within museum repository space. Educational collections may be designated from items under university purview; the Museum may provide tracking and indexing services as an arm of FHSU. Once acquired by the Museum, these or other items have to go through a deaccessioning process to be given to the University.

The Museum acquires specimens for its stated purposes and avoids acquisition for its own sake, even were freely donated gifts are concerned. Specimens for which the FHSM anticipates no foreseeable use for exhibition, research, education, or exchange will not be accepted. Potential donors of such items may be referred to other museums having an interest in and use for the offered specimen.

A. Field Collections:

Museum staff, FHSU students working with Museum staff, and associated research personnel undertake field collections to add to research collections. In accordance with federal and state law, all appropriate permits are to be in place prior to the collection of any fossils on public land. Permit numbers are recorded with specimen information upon curation. In cases of collaborative work with other institutions, a written agreement outlining the repositing and use of field collection should be obtained prior to fieldwork, whenever possible. Field collections at international localities will proceed in accordance with the laws of that country, and specimens

will be repositied in accordance with that country's law, US law, and any collection/research permits.

Museum time and resources may be utilized for fossil collection on private land as long as specimens are donated to the Museum. Donation papers will be issued to the landowners upon collection of the fossil (see Donations section below for more information). A legal landowner agreement is available for interested parties, or collections on private land may proceed case-by-case.

Natural history specimens and associated data collected by museum personnel using Museum resources – interpreted in the broadest sense – belong to the Museum, except as limited by conditions of collection or research permits.

B. Donations:

For its permanent collections, the museum requires outright donations with no conditions attached. Purchases are kept to a minimum and must fulfill a very specific domain of need, be unobtainable through donation or other means, come from verifiable sources or institutions, and meet all the stipulations of our [Code of Ethics](#). If a specimen is unique and needed for upcoming displays or collections, a Curator may make an exception upon the recommendations of museum staff, provided sufficient staff and funds are available for conservation and stabilization. Accessioned specimens must present an opportunity for the museum to expand or reinforce existing collections or displays.

FHSM will not knowingly or willfully accept or acquire any object or specimen illegally imported into or illegally collected in the United States. Due diligence will be pursued to ensure that items considered for acquisition have been collected and imported in full compliance with the laws and regulations of the federal government of the United States and of the individual states. All items collected in foreign countries must also have been obtained in compliance with the laws of those countries with documentation of legal collection and import. The Museum may accept specimens that have been confiscated and offered to the Museum by government authorities.

Donors desiring to take an income tax deduction must have an independent qualified appraisal made of the value of their gift. Appraisals can happen prior to, during, or after the specimen is donated. FHSM staff cannot provide appraisals to donors but are able to work with the appraiser of the donor's choice. The Foundation Office of Fort Hays State University verifies donations for tax purposes. If a donor chooses to have their non-cash charitable donation in excess of \$5000.00 appraised for tax deduction purposes, IRS Publication 561 is required. The appraiser will provide IRS Form 8283 documenting the donation valuation, which should be sent to the attention of the FHSU Foundation Office. A legal instrument of conveyance will be required for gifts, purchases, or bequests and can consist of a Deed of Gift, Bill of Sale, or Decree of Distribution and a Last Will and Testament.

Donation documentation will include the specimen(s) or specimen(s) description, restrictions if any, and considerations, if any, and will be kept in the accession files of the collections staff. A free and clear title will be required for all specimens and specimens acquired for the collections, without restrictions as to use, exhibition, loan, dispersal, or future disposition. After signing donor agreement documents, the specimen will become part of the Sternberg Museum of Natural History collections, to be incorporated into programs and activities at the Museum's collection staff's discretion. Donors and their family may "visit" their donation during normal business hours; please contact the appropriate [Museum staff member](#) a few days ahead of time to schedule a visit so that we can have your donation ready for you.

C. Repository Agreements:

The FHSM curates specimens from federal and state lands as a repository for the permanent care of biological and paleontological resource management collections from federal and state lands pertaining to the areas of emphasis stated in our mission. Curatorial agreements are maintained with the appropriate agencies and researchers, to be renewed annually; the designated fee for curation is collected for care and maintenance of the collection in perpetuity. These collections are processed via procedures set forth in the Curation procedures for each collection, with every effort made to provide any additional consultation and guidance to address conservation and processing before accession into FHSM collections. [Repository agreements](#) are available for organizations with access to public (state and federal) land resources and may be granted at the curator's discretion. Repository collections will be accessioned and maintained as part of the permanent collection.

5. ACQUISITIONS PROCEDURE

Every curator or employee authorized to acquire specimens for the permanent collections through field collection, gift, purchase, exchange or other means will reasonably ensure that clear and legal title can be transferred to and obtained by the Museum and accomplish through due diligence that the title is clear and valid. For specimens collected on public lands, the title will not transfer to the Museum: these specimens are held in trust in perpetuity under the authority of the State of Kansas or federal agencies. In doubtful cases, it is advisable to consult legal counsel and appropriate agency representatives.

It is essential that clear legal title to an acquisition be established prior to accessioning into the collections. It is the obligation of the curator or Museum employee making the acquisition to ensure that all information and documentation necessary for legal and binding accessioning is obtained and that all specimens acquired are immediately accessioned in accordance with current procedures. Documentation is required.

Collections staff, in consultation with the Education Director and Museum Director, will screen all possible non-repository donations. A transaction form will be filled out on all incoming

materials. Even if the specimen is not accessioned into the research collections, gift forms can still be issued for tax and record-keeping purposes.

If a specimen or collection is not accepted, its owner will be notified by letter of the decision and its rationale. If the object is being held at the Museum, it will be returned to the owner, and Museum staff may assist in finding another appropriate repository. If a specimen or collection becomes part of the permanent collection, the procedures outlined in this document must be followed.

All incoming biologic specimens for the permanent collection will be cataloged and placed in isolation for the designated period, examined for insects or pest damage, and crated if deemed necessary. A conservation record/condition report is started. Specimens will be cataloged, numbered, photographed, etc. No item will be placed in storage or on display without the previous procedure. There must be a written record (digital documentation in Specify) of all movements of the specimen within the museum. Staff members have specific assignments concerning the care and control of specimens under curatorial oversight.

6. CARE AND MANAGEMENT

FHSM is bound to provide the highest possible standard of care for its permanent and repositied collections. Selectivity in an acquisition, the first step in proper care. Because of its fiduciary responsibility to maintain and preserve specimens in perpetuity for the common good, FHSM will accept and acquire only those objects and specimens for which it can provide proper care, conservation, and storage.

During the accession and registration process, a condition report will be completed as needed for incoming specimens. Originating reports will remain on file with FHSM. Throughout the term of a specimen's reposit, its condition will be reassessed and any changes noted in addenda to be filed with the original documentation (in the electronic collection catalog for that collection). Other documentation concerning special care or extraordinary circumstances, health hazards, processes or substances applied, or other updated information is also added as needed. Inventories are undertaken on cataloged collections annually by the collection manager, curatorial assistants, and curators, and reconciled or spot-checked on a regular basis or when questions arise. For our Integrated pest management plan please contact our Zoological Collections Manager, Curtis J. Schmidt at cjschmidt@fhsu.edu.

Collections are housed in dedicated, secure storage spaces suitable for appropriate care. Storage spaces are chosen and monitored to ensure that collection specimens do not suffer undue environmental stresses. Collections made by curators or staff should only be made when an appropriate time frame for cataloging, storage, and research or education is assured. Specimens should not be collected when no provisions have been made for specimen preparation; this specifically applies to collections of living vertebrates. The museum supports the collection of vertebrates for research purposes but will not support the wasteful collection of living organisms.

The Sternberg Museum employs various techniques to track environmental conditions in storage. Conservation needs are discussed with partners and independent consultants, whose recommendations might include the creation of suitable microenvironments or other specimen-specific treatment.

Displayed specimens on exhibit require constant monitoring. Temperature and light levels in the museum's exhibit halls are set to levels appropriate to the integrity of exhibited specimens. Regular visual inspections are accompanied by spot checks with supplemental dataloggers and light meters to ensure adequate specimen care.

Insurance on the FHSM and its collections is managed by the State of Kansas. The State carries its own insurance for the non-building property. The property carries a \$1000.00 deductible amount, while the buildings are privately insured with a \$100,000.00 deductible. The State of Kansas carries an AAA bond rating.

7. LOAN POLICY

Outgoing loans: Loans to individuals with no institutional affiliations are not encouraged. Loans to students are granted through the major advisor.

Requests for outgoing loans of specimens must be in written form (paper or electronic) including purpose, detailed description of all analysis processes to be conducted on the items, and anticipated date of return. Proposed methods of packing, transportation, and security must be addressed in advance of the loan leaving the museum. Outgoing loans are authorized by the consent of the curator and in consultation with the director, when necessary. Books, maps, and research papers are to be studied on the premises.

Type specimens are not available for outgoing loans. Researchers wishing to study type specimens in person must make arrangements to visit the collections.

If specimens on loan from the Museum are used in an exhibit or mentioned in publications, appropriate recognition of the Sternberg Museum must be made. Specimens on loan from the Museum may not be reproduced by casting, copying, or other methods without the express written permission of the Museum (including the curator and director). Specimens borrowed from museum collections may not be reproduced for sale by other institutions or individuals without written permission.

Destructive Analysis: Loans for research involving destructive analysis may be made with the approval of the Curator; the Director may be consulted if deemed necessary. Requests require detailed documentation of the methods and purpose of the study. Conditions of the loan may be specified by the curator in the loan document, and will generally require molding, casting, photographing, and collecting measurements prior to destruction. Loan documentation will also

outline conditions regarding sharing, transfer, and repositing of research products such as slides, molds, casts, 2D and 3D image files, data tables, and remaining altered material.

Incoming loans: FHSM borrows specimens only on a short-term, temporary basis, only from verified institutions or sources, and only when the loan itself is circumscribed by a specific, dedicated purpose. When possible, donations rather than loans are encouraged from private parties. Exceptions to this temporary loan policy require a case-by-case evaluation by the curator and Director. Specimens should be in good condition and not require extreme conservation methods. They should also not incur major future expenses such as special cases, equipment, conservation, etc. The specimens will be considered temporary loans and will be accepted for a specified term, after which they will be reclaimed by or returned to their owners.

If specimens cannot be returned and are not reclaimed within a period of 25 years, the Museum has the right to assume and claim ownership of said specimens.

The parties responsible for payment and supervision of packing, shipping, monitoring, and care of items will be established beforehand. The Museum will not accept loans from employees. This issue is addressed specifically in the [Code of Ethics](#).

Repository collections: Specimens collected under permit from public lands will be accepted for care, exhibit, and research in Museum collections at the request of the agency and/or under contract with paleontological resource management companies. The specimens will be accessioned and cataloged into the Museum's collections, but the specimens will not be exchanged or removed from collections without express arrangements with the involved agencies.

8. OBJECTS IN TEMPORARY CUSTODY

As a service to the public, FHSM curators may attempt to identify or authenticate items brought to the FHSM. Identifications are done on an appointment basis, and are accomplished via non-intrusive means; if possible, individuals should take their possessions with them when they leave the Museum. If the additional examination or testing is required, the specimens are left for examination or identification under a temporary examination loan at the discretion of the curator or collections manager. A temporary registration receipt must be filled out on every specimen. Each specimen becomes a matter of record. Temporary custody receipts will be issued to the donor and Museum signed by both parties. The receipts will show a reclamation date for the loan, with clear instructions on the transfer of the specimen.

Individuals with specimens that are not donated to the Museum will be contacted to pick up the specimen upon identification by collections staff. Failure to retrieve the object from the Museum

within six months after the first attempt to contact will result in a transfer of ownership to the Museum. At that time, the collection staff will decide the best course of action for storing or disposing of the object. Should the individual wish to donate the object, the protocol will follow the procedure outlined above.

9. ACCESS TO COLLECTIONS

It is the Museum's intent to strike a balance between protection and care of specimens in the public trust with access to data and the opportunity to learn from those specimens. The FHSM will make every effort to give reasonable access to Museum collections to researchers whose projects are considered to fall within the general goals and purposes of the Museum, whenever such work does not affect the integrity of the collections themselves. Assistance will be limited only by space, time, and the established care and security needs of the Museum. The following conditions govern researchers:

- All-access for research requires an appointment. Visiting researchers should contact the appropriate curator with information outlining the purpose of the visit, specimens of interest, and a proposed timeframe for the visit.
- Permission to access collections will be made at the discretion of the appropriate curator or director. A plan of the research will be discussed so that possible impact on the studied items may be evaluated. Requests may be refused if they might compromise the condition or integrity of the collection or item.
- The Museum reserves the right to request recommendations for researchers unknown to the staff by acquaintance or reputation.
- All work with the FHSM collections is subject to close supervision by a curator.
- Admittance of individuals into the storage area and removal of specimens from storage for study shall be at the discretion of the appropriate curator and may vary with the duration, scope, and importance of the research project.
- Researchers will credit the Sternberg Museum of Natural History (FHSM) for any research assistance provided by the Museum when such information is used in print.
- Where destructive techniques are required in a research protocol, consideration will be given to that request if the process will result in a meaningful increase in scientific knowledge, and will yield significantly more data than non-destructive techniques. Any information gained from a destructive sampling of a specimen must balance the loss in other data, aesthetic value, and considerations arising from a specimen's rarity or contextual significance. A written proposal for destructive analysis may be requested at the curator's or director's discretion. New analytical techniques promise to use

increasingly insignificant portions for destruction and destructive techniques that consume only a small portion of a specimen, or that destroy specimens that were originally collected for destructive analysis, are preferred.

10. DEACCESSIONS

Deaccessioning is defined as the formal and permanent removal of specimens from museum collections or a legal transfer of ownership. Deaccessioning is used to weed out redundant, damaged, or lost specimens or specimens that are no longer relevant to the museum's mission. It is also used to close a file when a specimen is stolen or given to the university or in return for long-term loans. Deaccessioning might also be used to dispose of replicas when they have fulfilled their usefulness, worn out, or have been broken.

The Museum collections staff is responsible for maintaining records regarding the deaccessioning of any museum specimens.

Specimens cannot be deaccessioned until reasonable efforts have been made to establish the Museum's right to dispose of the specimens. Acquisition files must be studied and any mandatory restrictions imposed at the time of acquisition of the specimen must be carefully observed. The Museum will seek legal counsel if there is any question regarding the intent or direction of the restrictions. The curator and director are authorized to deaccession specimens less than \$1,000.00 in value. Any specimen or collection exceeding \$1,000.00 in value requires the review and recommendations of the Vice President of Administration and Finance, the President of the University, and the Museum Director. The Director, using his or her judgment, may seek further review legal counsel.

Deaccessioned specimens may never, under any circumstances, be offered for sale in the museum Gift Shop. Deaccessioned natural history specimens may never be transferred from public to private ownership. The following methods of the disposition may be used in the order of preference.

- Public perception, the interests of the Museum, the public, the public trust, scholarly and scientific communities, and current Internal Revenue codes or other related statutes must be carefully considered when selecting a manner of disposition.
- Fossils protected under local, state, or federal laws will be disposed of in strict observance of all laws governing their care and disposition.
- Type specimens and significant specimens that have been figured, photographed, or described in scientific or professional publications will not be removed from the public trust by sale or any other means under any conditions.
- Those items considered for deaccessioning will be offered to other departments within the museum (including the Museum's Education Department) or Fort Hays State University where they might have teaching or outreach value. The Director may offer

suggestions for the transfer of certain specimens based on the overall perspective maintained by the Director's office and relationships with the FHSU.

- If the items under consideration are judged to have no value to any museum or university department, consideration will be given to exchange or sell the items to another tax-exempt museum or other educational institution where they may serve an appropriate exhibit, educational, or research purpose.
- If no other disposition appears appropriate, total destruction of specimens should be the last resort. Specimen destruction will be approved by the Director, registered with appropriate documentation, and witnessed by at least two Museum staff members.

11. SENSITIVE SPECIMENS

Special consideration must be given to sensitive specimens in the following area:

- Endangered, threatened, special concern, extant plant or animal specimens in collections and exhibits
- Type specimens
- Vertebrate fossils collected from public land

All federal and applicable state regulations are strictly followed when handling the acquisition, disposition, and care of specimens in this category, and all relevant government agencies or parties of note are allowed full access to information regarding the specimens. It is the intent of FHSM to partner with respective jurisdictions to maintain strict control on sensitive materials while fulfilling our mission.