

## **AAM Position Statement University Natural History Museums and Collections**

November 2003

The American Association of Museums (AAM) expresses its deep concern that a significant number of America's natural history museums and collections affiliated with universities are currently threatened with severe financial cutbacks, dispersal of collections, and outright closure.

At risk are collections of irreplaceable objects, such as geological, paleontological, zoological and botanical specimens, anthropological and historical artifacts, and archives. These collections are held in trust for the public; they are the priceless heritage of this and future generations; and they constitute critically important resources for new knowledge.

University museums provide unique contributions to the public good through education and research. Their collections are a shared legacy, serving as a constantly growing database to document the diversity and history of life on earth, to develop strategies for the management of natural resources, and to find solutions to some of the world's most pressing problems, from biodiversity conservation to the discovery of new medicines. In addition, exhibits and programs in university museums help to advance broader understanding of the scholarly and scientific enterprise.

AAM urges university administrators, trustees, state legislators, and alumni to do everything in their power to preserve, protect and support their university museums and

collections of natural and cultural history. Temporary financial difficulties must not be allowed to interfere with the overriding responsibility of the governing authority to be effective stewards of these collections and to safeguard the public interest by assuring continued access to them.

AAM strongly urges the leadership of universities, and their museums to work together to develop creative financial and organizational strategies that will secure their museums and collections for future generations.

AAM also strongly urges universities, museums, governmental agencies, foundations, and other stakeholders to begin a national dialogue with the aim of providing long-term stability for America's university museums of natural history and their irreplaceable collections. A major aim is to strengthen connections to constituencies that can speak in support of these important museums.

###