



NORTH CAROLINA STATE MUSEUM OF NATURAL SCIENCES

Betsy Bennett, *Director*

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Report to the Joint Legislative Commission on Governmental Operations

In accordance with S.L. 2010-142 of the General Statute of North Carolina, I am writing as Chair of the North Carolina State Museum of Natural Sciences' Advisory Commission to present to you our annual report with recommendations for our educational and scientific institution.

First and foremost, I want to thank the General Assembly for support of the Museum. Legislative help in funding the now eleven-year-old Museum facility has led to our ranking among the top 10 natural history museums in North America. With more than 650,000 visitors annually, the Museum of Natural Sciences continues to be the most-visited Museum in the state and the #1 field trip destination for school groups in North Carolina. The Museum's economic impact is more than \$6 million annually. In addition, the Museum is attracting major conferences to North Carolina in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014.

Annual Update on Museum Activities and Priorities:

The Museum is looking towards the future to improve science education and economic development in North Carolina with the opening of the Museum's new wing, the Nature Research Center (NRC). The NRC is designed to engage students, teachers, and the general public in the scientific research that affects their daily lives. This innovative science center will provide visitors with the opportunity to work with scientists in investigate labs, discuss current science research in the "SECU Daily Planet" and directly **communicate the latest science research to every school in North Carolina** through the NCREN (North Carolina Research and Education Network) network. The NRC will have a positive impact on the number of students going into science and technology careers, and the number of teachers qualified to teach science. **The Nature Research Center is scheduled to open in April 2012.**

The Museum of Natural Sciences is continually looking for ways to improve the effectiveness of the Museum. Some of the Museum's long standing goals are to: 1) Improve financial sustainability by increasing Membership, major gifts, annual giving, funds from revenue centers, grant funding, funding of special projects and endowment; 2) Continue to improve programming by providing new and engaging public programs, new and engaging school programs for students and teachers, and providing Outreach NC to new audiences across the state; 3) Continue to improve management, through digitization of data and systematic biodiversity research initiatives, of the Museum's important research collections that document the natural history of North Carolina; 4) Operate a renovated and expanded Museum of Forestry, a satellite museum in Columbus County; 5) Increase public awareness of the Museum through collaboration, increased marketing,

special events, traveling exhibits, high definition and 3D productions, new programs, and revenue generating activities; and 6) Enhance the public's understanding of the scientific research that effects their daily lives by opening the Nature Research Center.

The Museum has made great headway with regard to improving the Museum's financial sustainability. The Museum's current auditorium is undergoing transformation to become the WRAL 3D theater which will open in late October and increase revenue through box office ticket sales. The Museum also continues to bring in popular revenue generating traveling exhibits. The Museum's newest uniquely interactive traveling exhibit, Genghis Khan will run from November 19 through January 16, 2012. The Capital Campaign for the NRC, lead by the Friends of the Museum, is at 87% of the \$34 million goal, and the Museum continues to receive significant grants for implementing education and research programs. Our successful television program, *Exploring North Carolina*, in partnership with Natural World Productions and UNC TV, has reached millions of viewers during its nine seasons. The newly renovated Museum of Forestry in Whiteville, NC, reopens this fall with a major new exhibit, *Prehistoric Giants*. In addition, the Nature Research Center will increase science education and research opportunities for students, teachers, and the general public while providing a science communication model for a national and international audience.

Museum Needs and Recommendations:

In order for the Museum of Natural Sciences to remain a world class institution that adds to the economic welfare and quality of life of North Carolina while preparing students for North Carolina's science and technology jobs of the future, operating support for the Museum must be sustainable. The Museum has initiatives to increase financial support as stated in this report and this must be complemented with stable operating support from the State.

RECOMMENDATION #1: Continue to provide the necessary State support to enable the Museum of Natural Sciences to carry out its mission to document the natural resources of the State, educate the public about science and the environment and engage the public in scientific research that affects our daily lives.

The Museum Advisory Commission has also sent another report to the Program Evaluation Division of Fiscal Research regarding the study on State attractions. The Museum has thrived under The Department of Environment and Natural Resources since its transfer from the Department of Agriculture in 1994. The mission of the Museum has been supported by and is compatible with DENR, and the Museum has collaborated with State Parks, the Zoo and the Aquariums to educate the public about North Carolina's environment and natural resources. The Museum Advisory Commission made major recommendations in that report which we emphasize again in this report.

RECOMMENDATION #2: The Museum of Natural Sciences should not be moved to a new department unless that move significantly improves the Museum's ability to carry out its mission.

The Museum has been free to the public for 132 years and provides important education and research to all North Carolinians. The Museum's successful business model that brings over 650,000 visitors to the Museum annually, combined with managing revenue centers (3D Theater, Traveling Exhibits, Gift Shops, Restaurants) inside the Museum, has served the Museum and the public well.

RECOMMENDATION #3: The Museum of Natural Sciences should continue to not charge admission.

The Advisory Commission makes these 2011-2012 recommendations that build upon the success of the Museum. With your support, we can 1) protect the state's capital investment; 2) improve services at the Museum and across the state; 3) provide improved learning opportunities to meet future challenges by educating students and citizens about our unique North Carolina natural environment; and 4) cultivate interest in science and technology and provide support for students seeking careers in science for future economic development.

The Advisory Commission and many others are working hard to ensure that your investment in the Museum continues to provide world-class exhibits, research, education and outreach programs that educate people about our environment and vital concepts in science and stewardship.

The Advisory Commission wants to thank you for supporting the mission of the Museum of Natural Sciences and the Nature Research Center. I and members of the Advisory Commission are available, at your convenience, to address any questions you may have.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "George W. House". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

George W. House
Chairman
Museum Advisory Commission
October 1, 2011