

ON THE USE OF UNITED STATES PUBLIC LANDS

POLICY STATEMENTS

Paleontological Resources on U.S. Public Lands

A joint statement by the Paleontological Society and SVP

The Paleontological Society and The Society of Vertebrate Paleontology are committed to increasing scientific knowledge, educational benefits, and appreciation of the natural world based on fossils — for everyone — child or adult, the general public, or amateur or professional paleontologists. Fossils are an invaluable part of our scientific and natural heritage. They yield detailed information about the history of life and of our planet, and provide lessons for the modern world and our future.

Many important fossil localities occur on U.S. public lands and belong to all people of the United States, including future generations. The Society of Vertebrate Paleontology and The Paleontological Society therefore support the development of policies and practices that can be used by different federal agencies to regulate the collection of fossils on U.S. public lands in an appropriate, clear and consistent manner.

Many fossils are common (for example, many non-vertebrate fossils) and should be allowed to be collected — in a responsible way — by any amateur or professional paleontologist, thus allowing them to experience and benefit from the excitement of discovery, recovery, identification and study. In particular, because of the benefits that derive from increased public appreciation of fossils, it is important that the participation of amateurs in paleontology is not discouraged by Federal policies and practices.

Other fossils are rare (for example, many vertebrate fossils and some non-vertebrate fossils), and require special protection, especially from destruction by vandalism or commercial exploitation. In particular, because of the dangers of overexploitation and the potential loss of irreplaceable scientific information, commercial collecting of fossil vertebrates on public lands should be prohibited, as in current regulations and policies. The commercial collecting of other paleontological resources on U.S. public lands should be strictly regulated by permit through the appropriate land management agencies. Regulations and policies regarding the collection of paleontological resources from U.S. public lands should be strictly enforced.

In this context, the Council of The Paleontological Society and the Executive Committee of The Society of Vertebrate Paleontology strongly support actions that:

- i) protect fossils on public lands as finite natural resources,
- ii) encourage responsible stewardship of fossils for educational, recreational, and scientific purposes,
- iii) promote legitimate access to, and responsible enjoyment of, paleontological resources on public lands by the public and amateur paleontologists for personal use, and by the professional paleontological community, including professional paleontologists from outside the U.S.; and
- iv) bring fossils from public lands into public institutions where they are available for purposes of education and scientific research.

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