**Executive Director’s Board Report**



**20 May 2023**

**J. B. Keiper**

* VMNH hosted two successful family science festivals: Bug Festival on January 28 and Reptile Festival on April 21-22. Total attendance was over 4,500 combined visitors.
* VMNH hosted the Virginia Chapter of the Wildlife Society’s annual conference. At the conference, Dr. Nancy Moncrief was awarded the 2023 Dr. Henry S. Mosby Professional Award (a lifetime achievement award for wildlife biologists and natural resources professionals).
* Museum-wide Wi-Fi upgrades have been completed, including password protected networks for staff and researchers. Outdoor Wi-Fi signal was also strengthened, which increases capacity for technology used at festivals.

Report on *Museum Without Walls 2020-2025*, and other initiatives of the Virginia Museum of Natural History.

***Enhancing our impact as Virginia’s only state institution mandated to investigate, preserve, and exhibit elements of natural history, as well as educate all citizens***

1. Establish three VMNH Research Centers

OVERVIEW: Combine labs to conceptually develop research centers to help market the high impact science conducted by VMNH curatorial staff.

* Four collaborative labs (Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab, Molecular Biology Lab, STEM Lab, and the Microscopy and Student Training Lab) are all operational.
* A biological sciences research technician, Marshall Boyd, has been hired to support the herpetology and mammalogy labs.
* The Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab team has grown, with Sonia Dixon, Kaitlyn Fitzgerald, and Abigail Maher hired as new analysts. Three in-person interns are also hired for the summer.

1. Rehab the Douglas Avenue building to support collections growth

OVERVIEW: The original museum building will receive a new roof and upgrades to electric, plumbing, and HVAC through Maintenance Reserve funds. The internal environment will be suitable for long-term storage needs of the curatorial staff.

* The new roof installation on Douglas Avenue was completed in July 2022.
* Preparations are underway to create collections-quality environment, such as improved envelope improvements (targeted summer/fall 2023), HVAC upgrades, dehumidifier installation, and plumbing upgrades. All projects will be paid for through maintenance reserve funds.

1. Obtain reaccreditation from the American Alliance of Museums

OVERVIEW: VMNH is due to apply for reaccreditation with AAM, which is the gold standard for best practices in collections care, service, and financial responsibility in 2025.

* The Board of Trustees has been informed, and an *ad hoc* Reaccreditation Committee was formed this year.
* Staff have worked to upgrade exhibitions and repair damaged areas, led by new Museum Experience Manager Bethany Fisher. VMNH recently purchased a triceratops to further enhance exhibits.
* Collection storage spaces were rearranged throughout the museum to ensure that all materials are stored appropriately.
* Staff are reviewing the Policies and Procedures Manual so all policies (such as ethics statements) required by AAM are up-to-date.
* Prior preparations for AAM review include:
  + Staff have worked for the past decade to counter the concerns of the last re-accreditation. In 2010, it was noted that only a small portion of the building accessible to public – since then we’ve added *Hahn Hall of Biodiversity*, *Hooker Furniture Discovery Reef*, *Wild Watersheds*, *Fossil Overlook*, *Ants: Farmers, Warriors, and Builders*. In addition, many more specimens and artifacts on display.
  + The 2010 report by the visiting committee noted a major challenge for VMNH being its relatively small square footage available to the paying visitor. In addition to the exhibit galleries listed above, staff have:
    - Increased the density of items on exhibit throughout the museum
    - Added online content
    - Opened the behind-the-scenes areas during key festivals
    - Began work to install a pavilion at the rear of the building
  + The visiting committee also noted that a diversity of revenues will be needed to reduce reliance on the annual appropriation for operations. Festivals and the upcoming VMNH-Waynesboro branch campus are solutions for revenue diversification.

***Sustaining VMNH by enhancing draw and impact through expanded facilities that will impart high quality scientific information and nature-based experiences for all***

1. Create an early childhood activity and learning center

OVERVIEW: The Library space is an underutilized facility at VMNH, and with upgrades to Douglas Avenue it will be suitable for long-term storage of the library materials. An exhibit and activity space will be created that focuses on pre-K through 5th grade to support our youngest visitors.

* The museum is requesting funding from the General Assembly during the January 2024 session for the full project.
* All library materials are in boxes. Once the HVAC updates at Douglas Ave. are complete, books will be rehoused there, and the shelving system will be surplused.

1. Build the Jean S. Adams Education Pavilion

OVERVIEW: A pavilion will be established behind the museum to connect visitors to the nearby J. Frank Wilson Park and will support durable outdoor exhibits featuring lessons in forest ecology.

* Bids for the project were opened on April 21st and selection of a contractor will follow.
* The current stairs do not meet VA code requirements and will be replaced through Maintenance Reserve Funds.
* Work to begin spring/summer 2023.

1. Explore the Treetop Canopy Walk concept

OVERVIEW: The concept of connecting the future Jean S. Adams Education Pavilion to J. Frank Wilson Park via a treetop canopy trail is being explored.

* Staff and trustees have met with architects and other museum professionals about the canopy walk. Further work to explore the canopy walk will be completed following the completion of the Jean S. Adams Education Pavilion.

1. Establish the first permanent branch campus of VMNH near the confluence of the Blue Ridge Parkway, Skyline Drive, and the Appalachian Trail

OVERVIEW: A Feasibility Study, Master Plan, and Capital Campaign Plan were all completed in 2015 to explore the concept of building a dedicated museum building next to Constitution Park in Waynesboro, VA. The City has committed $1 million in support of the project. This branch campus will draw from Shenandoah National Park and surrounding cities, giving VMNH access to new audiences and new revenue sources.

* The state’s Pre-Planning process for VMNH-Waynesboro was completed in 2019. VMNH has received funds for Detailed Design, and selected Glavé & Holmes Architecture to serve as the lead architecture firm. James Madison University will serve as Construction Manager (MOU signed) through Detailed Design and the eventual build of the museum building.
* The VMNH-Foundation currently has one member who lives in the area of Waynesboro/Augusta County. A future ad hoc committee dedicated to drawing community support for the VMNH-W campus will be established for the Foundation.
* Detailed Design has begun, primarily working with Glavé & Holmes Architecture, VernorJohnson Architects, and Riggs Ward Design. A final general conceptual design for the building was generated, and a preliminary review of the design was conducted by Department of Engineering and Building on 7 November 2022. The input was useful and the architects are taking the input into account.
* To date, the archaeological and geotechnical surveys have gone well and indicate no problems. The flood plain analysis underscored our predictions of a need to level the building with the high point of the lot (the northwest corner).
* During the second half of calendar year 2022, numerous presentations have been made to small groups and at presentation booths at festivals in the greater Waynesboro area, generating hundreds of new contacts. A periodic newsletter is issued to all contacts.
* Schematics for the building were completed and sent to DGS for review. Design teams, architects, and exhibit designers will move to Preliminaries immediately after. A Value Engineering assessment was also completed to ensure the project remains in budget.
* Schematics for Exhibits will be completed May 2023.
* VMNH-W did not move into the Capital Pool in the second year of the current biennium, but is listed as a priority project in the state’s capital outlay report.

Other Opportunities

1. Updating our Starling Avenue facility using a federal grant offered through the VA Department Energy to enhance our energy use efficiency and install renewable energy sources.
2. Electric vehicle charging stations are now open to the public and have added statewide EV charger map.
3. VMNH is hiring a new Buildings and Grounds technician who will receive special training that aligns with the new energy savings project.
4. VMNH continues to be a community cornerstone. In addition to its normal operations:
   * 1. Hosted the Martinsville-Henry County Chamber of Commerce Business After Hours event.
     2. Hosted the KidWind Challenge, in partnership with James Madison University, where local students competed with wind energy projects.
5. VMNH Research and Collections successes
   * 1. Dr. Arianna Kuhn has presented extensively, including running a workshop at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico and a seminar at the Field Museum.
     2. Prep work is underway for the Wyoming Dinosaur Dig, funded by the National Science Foundation in collaboration with Lynchburg University, July 2023 (first of 3 years of funding).
6. Advancement program upgrades
   * 1. VMNH is doubling the number of member events, helping to increase the value of museum memberships. Recent event including a members-only opening for the *Dinosaur Discoveries* exhibit and a members preview for Reptile Festival.
     2. The VMNH-Foundation is upgrading their donor database from Raiser’s Edge to DonorSnap, which will both cut costs and increase in technical capabilities.
     3. VMNH will hire its first Diversity Intern for summer 2023.