



**VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MINUTES OF THE RESEARCH AND COLLECTIONS COMMITTEE
Aug. 9, 2025, 9 A.M.
Virginia Museum of Natural History, Room 237 Conference Room A**

Present at the meeting were Dr. Art Evans, Dr. Melany Clark, Dr. David Furth, Dr. Tom Benzing, Dr. Joe Keiper, Ryan Barber, Dr. Hayden Bassett, Lauren Coleman, and Ben Williams. Attending the meeting via Zoom were Lisa Carter and Zach Ryder. Dr. Carole Nash was absent and a quorum was provided.

Committee chair Dr. Art Evans called the meeting to order. The committee unanimously approved the minutes from the May 17 meeting. The committee circulated the acquisitions sign-off sheet and approved it unanimously.

The committee discussed the museum's live animals policy, which had a small proposed change that would make it so the board would no longer have to approve every change to a live animal's care sheet. Dr. Art Evans said that as the former director of the Insect Zoo at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles, the policy is deeply important and aligns the museum with other major institutions. Dr. Melany Clark made a motion to approve the document and Dr. Tom Benzing seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

Dr. Hayden Bassett offered a brief presentation on the work being done in the museum's Cultural Heritage Monitoring Lab (CHML), which uses remote sensing tools to monitor worldwide cultural heritage sites threatened by conflict and weather. Dr. Bassett said that in an attempt to connect VMNH with contemporary issues and better communicate the museum's work to the public, the CHML publishes open access "rapid reports" through the Smithsonian. These reports feature timely information which needs to be disseminated as quickly as possible. Over the last 18 months, Bassett said, the CHML has published 36 rapid reports which have received roughly 44,000 reads. By contrast, some of the CHML's peer-reviewed journal articles receive tens of reads. The rapid reports have proven to be an effective way to communicate directly with stakeholders, including public media and state and local agencies. For example, Bassett said, after the devastating July 4 floods in Texas, the CHML was able to use satellite sensors to detect floodwaters and flagged sites that needed to be checked by local first responders. This request came from FEMA and the Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative.

Dr. Tom Benzing said that it would be useful to have another joint meeting of the museum's Facilities Committee and the Research and Collections Committee in order to discuss the next steps in the rehabilitation of VMNH's Douglas Avenue site. It was decided that the meeting will be held virtually on August 25th at 3 p.m.

Dr. Art Evans asked when the museum would begin advertising for its new herpetologist position. Ben Williams said that the job listing would be posted on August 15.

Dr. Art Evans adjourned the meeting.