

United States Department of the Interior



IN REPLY REFER TO:

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Dinosaur National Monument
4545 Highway 40
Dinosaur, Colorado 81610-9724

A3615

October 2002

Dear _____:

Thank you for your letter expressing concerns about the management of the paleontology program at Dinosaur National Monument.

Changes in the paleontology program at Dinosaur stem from the adoption of a position management plan that became effective October 1, 2002. The plan was developed in response to a request from the regional office which asked parks to develop a long-term plan for staffing that would provide the maximum amount of resource protection and visitor services in the most cost-effective manner possible.

The position management plan terminated nine positions throughout the park's operations. Most of the terminated positions have been unfilled in recent years due to budget constraints. However, two of the terminated positions are held by individuals exclusively engaged in paleontology research. Under the plan, the research-grade paleontologist position was changed to a non-research grade paleontologist position that emphasizes management of the research program, rather than hands-on research. The other paleontology position will be abolished via a transfer.

After both existing paleontology positions have been vacated, the plan calls for the creation of a new position called a "physical resources program specialist" that will be responsible for generating externally-conducted research and research funding for the park's paleontology resources and other physical resources. The new position will involve solicitation of grants and development of cooperative agreements or other collaborative arrangements for research and preparatory work with universities, state entities, and other federal agencies.

Shifting park staff duties from hands-on research to generating external research and support is necessary to ensure that Dinosaur obtains as much research and protection as possible for the amount of funding allocated to the park's various science programs. Dinosaur's other science programs have successfully generated thousands of dollars from grants, cooperative agreements, special funding, and hours of volunteer work.

Within the region, collaborative arrangements with Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units at several universities have produced significant research support for various parks in a highly cost-effective manner. In addition, working with partners gives the National Park Service the flexibility to collaborate with entities that are uniquely positioned to address a specific park research need. Such arrangements enable the National Park Service to seek creative and cooperative ways of ensuring the highest level of protection for park resources even in periods of stagnant budgets.

Understandably, changing/eliminating the two full-time park paleontology positions may appear to reflect a lack of commitment to the paleontology program at Dinosaur. In fact, our goal is to ensure that paleontology resources at Dinosaur benefit from the world-class expertise that can be found within universities and other institutions around the country and the world. Cooperative efforts with such partners enables the National Park Service to tap the vast expertise available outside the agency and apply that expertise to the protection and understanding of Dinosaur's world-class paleontological resources. The National Park Service increasingly is shifting its focus away from "in-house" research toward generating external research and funding. That shift reflects both limited budget resources, but also a growing awareness that National Park Service research activities cannot alone provide the information necessary to protect America's natural and cultural treasures.

Moreover, numerous efforts are underway to enhance resource management and visitor education at Dinosaur, all of which will benefit Dinosaur's paleontology program. For example, Dinosaur has received special funding to start rehabilitation of the Dinosaur Quarry Visitor Center, which hopefully will be completed in 2005/2006. In addition, initial work will begin in 2003 to develop an interpretive plan for the park, which will address the need for new exhibits at the Dinosaur Quarry Visitor Center. Dinosaur is also partnering with the State of Utah, local governments, and other federal agencies to construct a curatorial facility that will include fossil storage, fossil preparation, and a paleontology library. This facility will be built in conjunction with a new Utah Field House Museum.

We know that any major change, including major organizational changes, often produce anxiety and concern. For this reason, it is never easy to implement such changes. But please be assured that we are implementing these staffing changes to ensure that Dinosaur receives the level of research attention and expertise that it deserves.

Again, thank you for your interest Dinosaur National Monument's paleontology program. For further information or questions, please contact me at 970-374-3001.

Sincerely,

Chas Cartwright
Superintendent