

Rep. Adam Schiff
437 Cannon House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Schiff:

I was shocked to learn just last week that the new Superintendent of Dinosaur National Monument (who has only been on the job eight months) plans to abolish paleontology and eliminate both paleontology positions at the Monument. This is almost oxymoronic—how could you have a monument dedicated to dinosaurs and eliminate all the dinosaur experts? Who could manage such a park—a wildlife biologist or a grasslands ecologist? Only a trained paleontologist is qualified to supervise the continuing excavation and research on dinosaurs in the park, and to prepare the material for public consumption—not some Park Service bureaucrat with no training in paleontology. Clearly, this decision makes no sense whatsoever, and I cannot believe it is even being considered.

The decision is even more astounding in light of the fact that the monument is building a new museum and exhibit facility. Who would prepare the specimens and write the displays for the exhibits? Who would train the docents and guides? Obviously, a dinosaur expert is required, and currently the Monument has two very good paleontologists in Dan Chure and Scott Madsen—but now the Superintendent wants to eliminate their positions. The Monument has had a 50-year history of on-site paleontological research, and now the Park Service is suggesting that it fall back to the 1930s when it had caretakers who knew nothing about dinosaurs, just crowd management. But even that makes no sense, because the large existing collections, and the delicate specimens now on display, need someone with the proper expertise to curate them and protect them, or else they will be lost forever.

I would greatly appreciate it if you could look into this matter, and explain why such a bizarre decision is being made, which will forever damage this important public resource. The entire paleontological community is up in arms about it, and if the public were to know about it, so would they—dinosaurs have lots of friends these days!

Sincerely,

Donald R. Prothero
Chair and Professor of Geology
1991 Schuchert Medalist in Paleontology

cc: Director, National Park Service
Sen. Robert Bennett
Sen. Orrin Hatch
Sen. Barbara Boxer
Sen. Dianne Feinstein
Rep. Adam Schiff