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October 28, 2002

Ms. Fran Mainella, Director  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington DC 20240

Ref.: Decline of Paleontology at Dinosaur  
National Monument

Dear Director Mainella:

Although paleontological resources are important within many units of the National Park Service, Dinosaur National Monument has been the flagship entity within NPS for scientific research and public education in vertebrate paleontology. Indeed, the very name of the monument raises expectations within its visitors that this is a place to obtain special knowledge about life during the Mesozoic. And that has been the reality, as well, as exhibited through on-going excavations and publication of new discoveries. As you are well aware, the park was established in the first place to emphasize paleontology of these giants of the past.

It is my understanding, however, that local administration of DNM is curtailing the staffing relevant to expertise in Mesozoic vertebrates. As a practicing paleontologist, that saddens me greatly. I hope you will not consider me too presumptuous or meddling within internal affairs of the NPS, but I would very much like to present a professional viewpoint on this issue from the outside. So please accept my words in the positive spirit of advice that I intend — and not as negative complaining about the recommendations of the Superintendent of DNM.

I've gone to some trouble to gain the facts about the local recommendations for staffing. Summarized, they are as follows: 1. elimination of a geologist position that is now used as a slot for a paleontological preparator who aids progress in research; 2. transformation of duties for a research-grade paleontologist to those emphasizing management and educational issues — this is to be followed eventually by elimination of a second geologist position and its replacement by a physical resources manager; 3. hire a new wildlife biologist; and 4. hire a new specialist in Geographic Information Systems.

Certainly everyone would recognize the need within almost any unit of NPS for personnel related to "3" and "4" of the preceding paragraph. Additionally, almost everyone would recognize the need to retain a botanist and an archaeologist on the professional staff at Dinosaur. What I am questioning is the wisdom of weakening the proven high quality of Mesozoic paleontology within that particular park by its replacement with more generalized expertise. Also, it is my understanding that a new museum (including exhibits, research facilities, and collections) is soon to be built at Dinosaur. Not to maintain a strong paleontological research presence in the park as commitment to the new structure is finalized would seem to constitute a significant step backwards.



NPS DIRECTOR FRAN MAINELLA

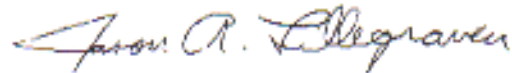
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My main point certainly is not that additions to the professional staff at Dinosaur NM should be avoided. Also, I am not suggesting that the Superintendent's hands be tied in terms of broadening the scope of professional activities within that monument. But what I am suggesting is that the strong emphasis on research-level Mesozoic paleontology within the facility should not be weakened through its replacement by more generalized services. The existence of a unit within NPS that focuses on the science and practice of paleontology is important to the scientific, educational backbone of this nation.

Thank you for your patience and willingness to read my suggestions.

Sincerely yours,



Jason A. Lillegraven, Professor  
Departments of Geology/Geophysics  
and Zoology/Physiology

copy to: U.S. Senator Robert Bennett

JAL:me