



CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE & RESILIENCE

A Three-Year Extension of our Institutional Strategic Plan (2020-2023)

**MUSEUM
OF NATURAL
AND CULTURAL
HISTORY**

CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE & RESILIENCE

A Three-Year Institutional Strategic Plan Extension (2020-2023)

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The University of Oregon Museum of Natural and Cultural History is located on Kalapuya ilihi, the traditional homeland of the Kalapuya people. We honor the Native history of the Willamette Valley and the Indigenous People who continue to call it home.



The Museum of Natural and Cultural History is a center of interdisciplinary research and education, serving the University of Oregon, the state of Oregon, Native American Tribes, federal agencies, the research community, K-12 students and teachers, and the wider public in Oregon and beyond.

OUR MISSION

The Museum enhances knowledge of Earth's environment and cultures, inspiring stewardship of our collective past, present, and future.



A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Museum Supporters,

Now in my 16th year as executive director of the University of Oregon Museum of Natural and Cultural History (MNCH), this is the third strategic plan crafted under my watch.

In 2006, we created an ambitious ten-year plan (2006-2015) that significantly expanded the museum's facilities, staff, programs, and endowments. The next plan (2016-2020) built on those successes and included a detailed self-study and evaluation by external reviewers from the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). As we worked to realize the goals set forth in those plans, we further professionalized the museum's operations, earned full accreditation by the AAM in 2016, won a coveted National Medal for Museum and Library Service in 2018, and more than doubled our public space with the opening of our permanent natural history exhibit, Explore Oregon.

Unfortunately, at the pinnacle of success, the University of Oregon reduced the museum's general fund budget, resulting in a 19.2 percent cut in 2019. Efforts continue to stabilize funding and include the recent and outstanding achievement of surpassing our 10-year fundraising goal of \$13 million. These funds—the sum of more than 6,000 individual gifts—directly support museum programs while also building the endowments that guarantee the museum's financial stability for years to come. I am incredibly grateful to the many donors who contributed to this successful campaign and look forward to their continued support.

As of this writing, I plan to serve as museum director for three more years, until the end of June 2023. That will take the MNCH through the three-year strategic plan extension (2021-2023) presented here—a plan attenuated by the realities and uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic that still grips the world as we approach the end of 2020. Although the pandemic poses enormous challenges for the MNCH, I am as optimistic as ever that the museum will keep building on its momentum—finding creative new ways to serve our communities, practicing and publishing groundbreaking science, stewarding Oregon's publicly owned collections, and helping to move our world toward a more just and sustainable future.

I am also confident that the museum's next five-year strategic plan, which will prepare us for reaccreditation by the AAM, will reflect the input of a dynamic new director who will lead the MNCH into a bright future.

I am deeply grateful to David Piercy, Patricia Krier, and Ann Craig for spearheading the 2020 strategic planning effort and to the MNCH staff members and supporters who contributed data and insights to guide the museum through the next three years. I invite you to explore the plan and look forward to celebrating with you as we realize its aims.

Jon M. Erlandson
Executive Director

FORWARD AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

These are challenging times for museums, other educational institutions, and the nation as a whole. The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed the ways we interact with one another, necessitating social distancing, remote learning and working, and a host of other preventive practices that are reshaping museum operations—and indeed, our day-to-day lives.

The challenges of the day invite us to be flexible, creative, and caring as we envision the future of the Museum of Natural and Cultural History (MNCH) and its ever-expanding service to Oregon students, Tribes, agencies, families, and communities. From heritage preservation to climate research to educational programming and outreach, the museum's work remains essential to these diverse constituencies—and its role as a community anchor becomes all the more imperative—as the pandemic continues to shape our personal, social, and professional lives.

As a part of our 2016 accreditation by the American Alliance of Museums, we adopted a five-year Institutional Strategic Plan (2015-2020) called Building on Our Momentum. Just as we began work on a new five-year plan in the spring of 2020, COVID-19 forced the museum to temporarily close, limiting our ability to meet in groups for substantive planning.

As the pandemic continues and economic uncertainty mounts, we face unexpected and long-term funding challenges as well as new opportunities and directions for growth. Realizing the importance of a shared vision at this critical time, we are forging ahead with a three-year extension of our 2015-2020 plan. The extension presented here is a product of input from museum staff, volunteers, members, the Museum Advisory Council, and other stakeholders. It provides context, articulates the museum's core activities, identifies our vision, mission and basic tenets, and lays out our strategic directions, goals, and tactics for the next three years.

Our three strategic directions are to:

Strengthen our resilience in the midst of uncertainty;

Build on our momentum in science, education, equity, and inclusion; and

Protect our collective scientific legacy and cultural resources.

“Success in our society requires information, self-reliance, and the ability to collaborate, communicate effectively, and solve problems. Museums and libraries help inspire the pursuit of new information, encourage a spirit of inquiry, and build collective knowledge for our nation.”

—Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2018



MUSEUMS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

“The museum is committed to truth and facts in a world that increasingly disagrees on how to distinguish fact from fiction. Indeed, trust in government, media, academia, industry, and even nonprofit organizations is at an all-time low. But even as trust declines across the board, nonprofits in general, and museums in particular, remain among the most trusted sources of information. How can museums retain and build upon this trust? How can they help society reestablish a common framework for telling fact from fiction?”

—TrendsWatch 2020,
American Alliance of Museums, 2019

CONTEXT AND STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

WHY DEVELOP A THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN EXTENSION?

In early 2020, we began to develop a new five-year institutional strategic plan (2020-2025). We planned to evaluate our 2015-2020 strategic plan by connecting with stakeholder groups to ensure accountability, reviewing our achievements, and brainstorming how to respond to change and challenges. The new plan was intended to prepare the museum for the American Alliance of Museum’s reaccreditation process scheduled for 2025.

However, the process was cut short as COVID-19 made its way to Oregon, necessitating the temporary closure of the museum, shifts in our planning priorities, and a pressing need to articulate a shared vision for the shorter-term future. In response to these dynamic circumstances, we elected to create an extension of our existing five-year strategic plan and to postpone development of the new five-year plan. As an extension, the plan presented here is not as complete as a typical five-year plan would be. It is important to refer back to the 2015-2020 document for more extensive and complete information about the museum and our research, collections, and public programs.

We will resume development of the five-year plan over the next three years.

CREATING OPPORTUNITY

When the pandemic forced us to temporarily close our exhibits space in March 2020, we immediately began work—across museum divisions and with the community—to expand our virtual presence and educational outreach, adjust our exhibits schedule, and continue our critical work in research and collections. The museum has since reopened to the public on a limited basis and in compliance with the state’s COVID-19 safety protocols, but we continue to prioritize the development of programs and exhibitions that will effectively reach remote audiences, support continued excellence in research, and encourage curiosity and connection during this socially distant time.



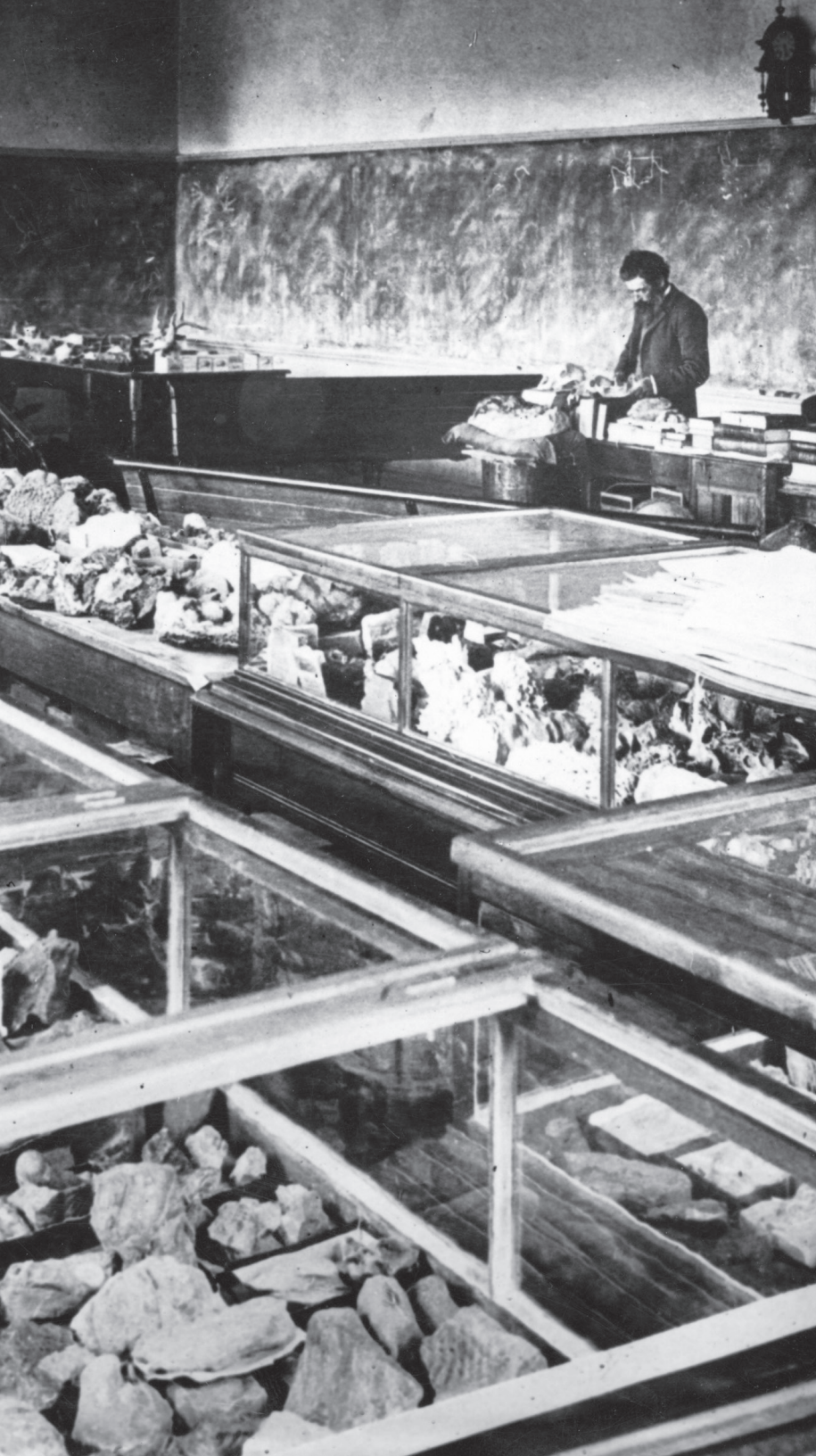
OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CHALLENGES

Over the last five years, the museum has celebrated significant accomplishments including a 2018 National Medal for Museum and Library Service from the Institute for Museum and Library Services, a robust fundraising program that recently surpassed our \$13 million dollar campaign goal, an expanded portfolio of exhibits focused on social and environmental justice, and the digitization of substantial portions of our anthropological and natural history collections. The museum has also expanded its educational outreach program into 35 of Oregon's 36 counties; continues to provide educational, social, and leadership opportunities to hundreds of University of Oregon students each year; conducts research in service of state and federal agencies and Oregon Tribes; annually publishes dozens of peer-reviewed studies in top scientific journals; and has seen a tenfold increase in popular media coverage. From 2017 to 2020, however, the University of Oregon reduced its support for the museum's programs by 20.2 percent. While the expansion of the museum's endowments—from about \$450,000 in 2005 to \$7.25 million today—has helped reduce the impacts of such cuts, further university cuts may be on the horizon.

Our aims, especially during COVID-19 and the financial uncertainty it brings, are to strengthen our financial independence and resilience; build on our momentum in science, education, equity, and inclusion; and protect our scientific legacy and cultural resources. Key challenges over the next two to three years will include potential budget reductions, the retirement of our executive director and other key administrative and curation staff members, fully integrating Oregon Folklife Network into museum operations and branding, and inspiring learning and dialogue that will help build a more just, inclusive, and sustainable future.

“The museum has come a long way over the last few years.... It continues to undertake a first-rate research program, which is a major contribution to the university's intellectual life, and has fully embraced and expanded its public role to serve the wider community.”

—American Alliance of Museum, 2015



ABOUT THE MUSEUM

Officially created by an act of the state legislature in 1935, the museum has its roots in the late 1800s, when geologist Thomas Condon joined the University of Oregon as one of its first three professors and brought his extensive fossil collection to the UO. Known as the Condon Fossil Collection, the assemblage remains at the heart of the museum's paleontological collections. During the 1930s, archaeologist and founding director Luther Cressman uncovered evidence of late Pleistocene and early Holocene human settlements in central Oregon, establishing the museum as a major engine of archaeological research in the state.

Today, the MNCH is the State of Oregon's official repository for publicly owned anthropological and paleontological collections

and is home to hundreds of thousands of ethnographic and archaeological objects, fossils, and biological specimens from Oregon and around the world—together comprising the state's premier research collection. In 2013, with the closure of the Jensen Arctic Museum at Western Oregon University in Monmouth, the museum adopted the Jensen Arctic Collection, an assemblage of over 5,000 objects that, combined with our other materials from the region, make the museum home to one of the largest Arctic collections in the lower 48 states.

In 2018, the museum adopted Oregon Folklife Network, the state's folk and traditional arts program, which documents and supports diverse cultural traditions and tradition-bearers and serves as a hub for statewide folklife activities.

The museum annually welcomes more than 30,000 visitors and serves another 20,000 Oregonians through its statewide outreach programs.

WHAT WE DO

WORLD-CLASS RESEARCH

Research by MNCH scientists is actively reshaping our understanding of Oregon's natural and cultural history.

Archaeology: The museum is home to Oregon's most active archaeological research program and has lead the way toward new understandings about the region's cultural past. Working within Oregon and throughout the Pacific Northwest, the Pacific Rim, and Europe, museum archaeologists have uncovered fragile, millennia-old Oregon basketry, 14,000 year-old coprolites (desiccated feces) left by some of the continent's earliest settlers, cultural remnants from Oregon's 19th-century Chinese immigrant communities, and the homesteads and cemeteries of Oregon Trail pioneers.

Through field schools, grant-funded studies, and collaborations with corporations and public agencies, museum archaeologists help to uncover, protect, and preserve Oregon's and America's rich cultural heritage. Key partners in these endeavors include the Oregon Department of Transportation, National Park Service, and the United States Bureau of Land Management.

Paleontology: The Condon Fossil Collection is an active research and curatorial unit. The museum's paleontologists and visiting scholars are constantly working to understand the fossil plants and animals housed in our collections and their implications for natural history, climate change, and future ecosystems.



SIGNIFICANT COLLECTIONS

The museum is home to an invaluable record of Earth's environments and cultures. As the state's official repository for Oregon cultural and paleontological materials, our vaults house hundreds of thousands of objects ranging from archaeological and ethnographic items to fossils and geological specimens. The museum also curates extensive zoological and zooarchaeological collections used for comparison and identification of specimens from paleontological and cultural sites. Together, the collections inspire wonder, stewardship, and scholarship in Oregon and beyond.

MNCH collections grow each year from a combination of scientific fieldwork, donations, and transfers from other organizations. The museum is also the repository for numerous research collections generated by UO faculty, staff, and students.



PUBLIC PROGRAMS

EDUCATION, EXHIBITS, AND OUTREACH

MNCH education programs serve many audiences, including university faculty, students, and staff; K-12 students and teachers; families; and communities around the state. Through innovative offerings and broad outreach, the education team engages diverse audiences in important conversations about science, history, and stewardship.

The museum's exhibits department develops and manages a program of exhibits spanning scientific research, cultural and natural history, student research, and the arts with a focus on inclusion and social justice. In addition to two permanent exhibits showcasing Oregon's natural and cultural history, the museum produces a variety of shorter-term exhibits that rotate throughout the year.

CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION

MNCH could not do its work without the professional services provided by its Central Administrative Unit. The unit supports all museum divisions with business and information technology services; communications, marketing, and media relations; and a robust development and fundraising program. The central administration staff also helps ensure compliance with university-wide business, development, and communications requirements.



"Museums, in their cultural roles of memory keeper, conscience, and healer, have an obligation to provoke reflection, rethinking, and rebalancing. Museums help us understand our science and history and to use that science and history to help us deal with the dark side of history, not just emotionally and personally, but in a way that builds a just and equitable society."

— TrendsWatch 2020,
American Alliance of Museums, 2019

WHO WE ARE:

OUR VISION, MISSION, AND BASIC TENETS

Our vision, mission, and basic tenets reflect the responsibility that the Oregon State Legislature, the University of Oregon, and the State Board of Higher Education vested in the museum beginning in 1935.

OUR VISION

The museum is a leader among university museums of natural and cultural history, a catalyst for intellectual discovery, a contributor to the University of Oregon's mission, and a connection to our research and collections for diverse constituents.

OUR MISSION

The museum enhances knowledge of Earth's environment and cultures, inspiring stewardship of our collective past, present, and future.

OUR BASIC TENETS

Everything we do is based on the following tenets:

- The museum enhances knowledge through scientific research and excellence.
- We are nimble as we respond and adapt to a rapidly changing and unpredictable world.
- We recognize that continuing to be excellent requires us to respond to and encourage change and growth.
- We protect objects, perspectives, and scientific knowledge that are significant to enhancing understanding of human and environmental history.
- We know that creating a better future builds on our legacy.
- We are responsible for recognizing and illuminating persistent inequities among historic and contemporary communities.
- We strive to practice inclusivity and grow empathy.
- We accept that controversy is inevitable and acknowledge that museums must not be neutral when it comes to questions of justice and sustainability.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS AND GOALS

Grounded in our vision and mission, our commitment to resilience and excellence, and our focused intention to support the needs of our community—especially during these uncertain times—we will pursue three broad strategic directions and their associated goals over the next three years:

STRENGTHEN OUR RESILIENCE in the midst of uncertainty.

- Respond flexibly and creatively to the financial, program, and funding challenges caused by COVID-19 and university budget reductions.
- Further expand MNCH endowments.
- Continue to raise the museum's profile at the university, in our regional communities, across the state, nationally, and internationally.
- Engage in thoughtful succession planning, considering potential organizational changes and the transfer of knowledge, relationships, and practices as senior scientists and the executive director retire.
- Initiate the development of a new five-year Institutional Strategic Plan.

BUILD ON OUR MOMENTUM in science, education, equity, and inclusion.

- Use insight into history and science to build a more just, inclusive, and sustainable future.
- Leverage partners and networks to increase impact.
- Align and link activities across museum divisions.

PROTECT OUR SCIENTIFIC LEGACY AND CULTURAL RESOURCES.

- Ensure the safe and secure storage and display of MNCH collections, including the safekeeping of collections that will transfer to the museum as senior scientists retire.





IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

This implementation plan specifies our strategic directions, goals, and tactics over the next 3 years. Each museum division and department has provided a workplan to help ensure that we meet these goals and objectives.

STRENGTHEN OUR RESILIENCE IN THE MIDST OF UNCERTAINTY.

OBJECTIVES

- Implement and practice the highest standards for health and safety.
- Stabilize the museum's funding base by increasing philanthropic donations, grants and contracts, and other revenue streams for support of operations and programs. Identify new revenue sources that align with the mission and programs of the museum.
- Maintain relationships and raise the museum's profile with stakeholders including donors, agencies, UO administration, elected officials, volunteers, and collaborators.
- Review and redesign the organizational structure of the museum to prepare for potential funding reductions and new leadership and improve operational efficiency by documenting division procedures, including improved IT support and project management software.
- Initiate the development of the new five-year strategic plan.



BUILD ON OUR MOMENTUM IN SCIENCE, EDUCATION, QUALITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION.

OBJECTIVES

- Secure reliable and effective support of the museum's website to make it more accessible to the public and allow improved virtual exhibits and programs; continue the development of the museum's online educational presence.
- Continue the pursuit, publication, and interpretation of scientific research, exploration, and excellence.
- Demonstrate continued work toward inclusion and social justice.



PROTECT OUR SCIENTIFIC LEGACY AND CULTURAL RESOURCES.

OBJECTIVES

- Continue digitization of collections and processing of new gifts.
- Plan for the transition and safekeeping of the Retallack and Moss collections as these staff members prepare to retire.
- Prepare the outline of a collections plan which identifies all current collections, their locations, and minimum best practice storage and display requirements; collection policy requirements, including standards for receiving donations and objects and collections; additional IT needs; standards for the display of collections; and a cross division process for developing that plan.

Acknowledgements

In addition to the museum staff members who contributed to this plan's development, we want to recognize the many advisors, supporters, and volunteers whose energy and direction help the museum stay strong and vital. This plan would not be possible without them, and we look forward to their continued support as we realize its aims.

Executive Director and Professor (Emeritus) of Anthropology Jon Erlandson has led the museum since 2005 with integrity and vision. He has led us through good times and challenging times, and under his leadership we have thrived.

Museum volunteers regularly give of their valuable time and many of them, along with members of the museum, provided important feedback.

The Museum Advisory Council offers ongoing support and feedback to the museum and participated enthusiastically in this planning process.

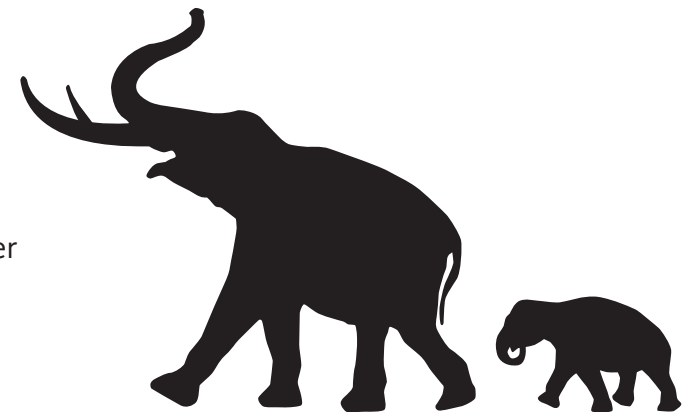
We appreciate your help.


These key individuals and their staffs provided the information and background necessary to develop this plan:

Tom Connolly, Director of Archaeological Research
Ann Craig, Director of Exhibitions and Public Programs
Edward Davis, Condon Fossil Collection Manager
Pamela Endzweig, Director of Anthropological Collections
Scott Fitzpatrick, Associate Director
Erin Hart, Senior Associate Director of Development
Emily Hartlerode, Director, Oregon Folklife Network
John Ivie, Systems Administration Specialist
Dennis Jenkins, Senior Archaeologist
Elizabeth Kallenbach, Anthropological Collections Manager
Julia Knowles, Lab Manager
Madonna Moss, Curator of Zooarchaeology
Greg Retallack, Director of Paleontological Collections
Jessica Stone, Graduate Teaching Fellow
Kristin Strommer, Director of Communications and Marketing
Jason Younker, Vice President & Advisor to the President

The Plan Development Committee:

David Piercy, Chair of the Museum Advisory Council
Patty Krier, Retired Director of Public Programs and Museum Advisory Council Member
Ann Craig, MNCH Director of Exhibitions and Public Programs





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