

FOSSIL COLLECTING ON FEDERAL PUBLIC LANDS

WOODBURNE, Michael, O., Dept. of Earth Sciences, University of California, Riverside, CA 92521, U.S.A.

Federal policies regarding the collecting of fossils from Federal public lands are in accord with U.S. citizenry's views of these matters. In that our national fossil heritage as preserved on public lands belongs to all people of the United States, individual ownership is not condoned. Thus, policies that recognize the importance of conserving for the public domain and for posterity our national fossil heritage provide that the collecting of such fossils be done under permit by representatives of universities, museums and other public institutions. The public benefits from this process by the dissemination of information obtained from fossil specimens by trained professional paleontologists. Constructive commercialization of our fossil heritage comes from the translation of factual information to the media, public institution display, development of movies, documentaries and the like for the cinema and television. Marketing of products based on interpretation of body reconstructions, life styles and the like of prehistoric animals furthers not only the commercial process but also the enjoyment by the consumer. All of this results from legitimate exercise of the results of the scientific/educational process. On the other hand, commercial collecting of public domain fossils for sale is inimical to the scientific-educational process and is properly disallowed under current Federal statute. Avocational paleontologists are not enfranchised, as individuals, for collecting fossils on public lands. At the same time virtually all major and many smaller public museums and institutions carry out strong outreach programs to encourage avocational paleontologists to enter into partnership so as to enhance the avocational access to, and enjoyment of, our national fossil heritage.