Considerations for Digitization Requests and Digital Asset Rights of Smithsonian Paleobiology Collections

Ms Jessica Nakano[1], Paleo Informatics Manager Holly Little[1]
[1]Smithsonian National Museum Of Natural History, Washington, United States

The global influx of collections digital access inquiries encouraged new approaches by the Paleobiology Department (Paleo) at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History (NMNH). Creation of digital assets through 3D/CT Scanning and 2D imaging is not new for our collections, but pandemic closures pushed the need to review open-questions about usage terms/permissions for external and internal entities, and standards for processing and tracking digital assets. New strategies also required expanded coordination across departmental informatics and registration work.

In 2020, the Smithsonian launched a new Open Access (OA) initiative requiring reevaluation of existing digital assets and previous protocols for designating usage rights. NMNH established an Intellectual Property and OA working group to address varying unit concerns and preferences for managing digital assets, mostly due to collection type and professional structure. This motivated us to identify Paleo's specific needs first and consult resources nationally and abroad, including initiatives like DiSSCo.

Here we share our findings, building a perspective on digital transformation and transparency. Our roles, as Informatics Manager and Registrar, aligned as key views to condense and clarify our understanding about applicable rights and permissions for digitizing Paleo collections and ensuring long-term care and management of digital assets. We assembled department resources that established and dispensed our knowledge base. Each form, policy and workflow accounts for the evolving needs of our unit, NMNH community, Smithsonian Policies and US Intellectual Property landscape. These major components powered our approach, adaptation, and implementation:

-Understanding core legal and ethical considerations for digital assets of natural history collections in the US and dispersing that knowledge.
-Status of digital assets, current management for tracking usage terms/permissions, and distribution.
-Utilize existing collections information system (EMu) or develop new tools for tracking record creation, embargos, and use/requests for digital assets.
-Professional structure and roles.
-Implementation of Smithsonian OA.

This information gathering and evaluation process helped us better engage in discussions within our Museum and with external communities. Ultimately, we aim to continue the collective focus on national and international efforts to standardize requests and usage terms for creation and use of digital assets for biodiversity collections.