



Student Assembly

1 **Resolution 27: Preventing an Extinction**

2 **Abstract:** A resolution calling on Cornell University to intervene in the Paleontological Research
3 Institution's financial crisis.

4 **Sponsored by:** Adam Vinson '25, Eeshaan Chaudhuri '27, Will Hooker '24, Lani Lin-Kissick
5 '28, Nooriya Baxamusa '28, Eric Yao '27, Letiunasema Nuusila '27, Tianyi Chen '28

6 **Reviewed by:** Environmental Committee, 7-0-0

7 **Type of Action:** Recommendation

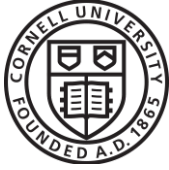
8 **Originally Presented:** 01/30/2025

9 **Current Status:** Placed on the Second Reading Calendar, 01/30/2025

10 **Whereas,** the Paleontological Research Institution (PRI) holds formal affiliation with Cornell
11 University ([since 20 November 2004](#)) and the student body. PRI's Museum of the Earth (MotE)
12 is not only a natural history museum that students can visit for free as part of a Cornell class, or
13 at a reduced charge on their own, but it is also an exciting field trip destination, an interactive
14 classroom that teaches Earth history, climate, and the evolution of life, and an invaluable
15 resource for student projects and honors theses.

16 **Whereas,** the MotE is home to one of the world's largest fossil collections with over 7 million
17 specimens, including those found on Cornell's campus by Cornell students (e.g., members of the
18 Pangea Club at Cornell). This collection is made publicly available for students who request to
19 see them, which have formed the basis for many research projects. Students within the CALS
20 departments of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences (EAS), Ecology and Evolutionary Biology
21 (EEB), and Natural Resources and the Environment (DNRE) have incredibly close ties to the
22 Museum. Several classes within these departments, including the popular introductory biology
23 course BIOEE 1780 (An Introduction to Evolutionary Biology and Diversity) and 1,000-person
24 lecture BIOEE/EAS 1540/1560 (Introductory Oceanography), hold frequent field trips to the
25 MotE; many classes even hold lectures and laboratory sessions there, drawing upon the MotE's
26 vast collection for hands-on educational opportunities for student learning.

27 **Whereas,** the MotE actively encourages students to study, and even borrow, specimens from its
28 collections for their projects. As an example, a roommate of the lead sponsor asked to borrow
29 several specimens and teaching aides from the museum for an educational video on bird
30 anatomy. Additionally, the MotE accepts specimen donations from Cornell students, which are
31 ultimately used for future teaching and/or research projects. Many research-grade fossils come



Student Assembly

32 directly from Cornell’s campus, found by students in the Pangea Club at Cornell. For example, a
33 Cornell student discovered vast colonies of an exceptionally rare feather-shaped fossil, named
34 *Plumalina brevis* along the bottom of Six Mile Creek at the Mulholland Wildflower Preserve
35 during a severe drought in 2013 ([Muscente & Allmon, 2013](#)). Other rare specimens come from
36 Fall Creek at Flat Rock, where the armor plates of extinct fish called ‘placoderms’ are found.
37 More recently, in this past fall semester, the President of the Pangea Club discovered a new
38 species of trilobite, an extinct group of arthropods related to horseshoe crabs, in fossil deposits at
39 Beebe Lake. This discovery became the basis of her senior honors thesis, forever redirecting her
40 career into the field of paleontology. All of these specimens described, among the seven million
41 others, are now housed at the MotE and available for study.

42 **Whereas**, [in October 2023](#), the PRI, which runs the MotE and the Cayuga Nature Center (CNC),
43 announced that it was in financial trouble and would likely have to foreclose on the MotE’s
44 mortgage.¹This foreclosure is due to a group of large donors’ inability to fulfill their funding
45 pledges. Since then, the PRI has downsized its operations, including staff reductions at MotE and
46 CNC and the end of its live animal program at the CNC in [January 2024](#).²

47 **Whereas**, if the MotE closes, not only will upstate New York lose one of its only natural history
48 museums, but its collections are also put at great risk. Many fossils could be lost or disposed of,
49 along with all of the unobtained data and information we could gain from them. The loss of the
50 PRI, MotE, CNC, and the fossil collection would be a profound blow to the scientific community
51 and the countless Cornell students who would benefit from its invaluable education and outreach
52 programs.

53 **Be it therefore resolved**, that the Student Assembly, as elected representatives of the student
54 body, ask Interim President Kotlikoff and the Board of Trustees, as well as the deans of the
55 academic colleges, to collaborate with and financially support the Paleontological Research
56 Institution to keep the Museum of the Earth open. This institution holds scientific and intrinsic
57 value and must be preserved for future generations. This can be achieved through collaboration
58 with PRI’s Director and its Board of Trustees.

¹<https://www.priweb.org/press-releases/the-paleontological-research-institution-announces-downsizing-amidst-financial-challenges-8apwf>

²A hard decision noted by the nature center’s director of live animals, Shyia Magan, “The animals are a part of the fabric of what makes the nature center what it is to the community, and seeing that part torn away is difficult, but the nature center still has so much to offer.” <https://ithacavoices.org/2024/01/cayuga-nature-center-rehoming-dozens-of-animals-among-financial-woes/>



Student Assembly

59 **Be it further resolved**, that the university is recommended to take action to support the PRI and
60 MotE in ways including but not limited to the following:

- 61 I. Temporarily aiding the PRI financially and legally until they are able to find other, more
62 stable means of procuring financial support via parent organizations and other museum
63 support groups
- 64 II. Assisting the PRI to connect with and secure other donors via internal communication
65 lines and effective, relevant fundraising channels
- 66 III. Partnering with PRI to absorb a portion of the museum's collection into the university or
67 the Lab of Ornithology for further educational research while supporting PRI's continued
68 operations
- 69 IV. Collaborating with relevant departments at Cornell to partially fund a portion of the PRI's
70 day-to-day operating costs (e.g. ANTHR, EAS, NTRES, BIOEE, ENTOM, PLSCI,
71 BIOL)
- 72 V. Sponsoring the PRI entirely via financial support from the respective undergraduate
73 colleges, allowing for continued operations and an enhanced learning experience for
74 undergraduates

75 **Be it finally resolved**, as representatives of the student body we understand that Cornell
76 University and the PRI may not agree to any of the above listed solutions. However, we urge the
77 University to make an effort to help PRI, by opening up a transparent line of communication.
78 The constituencies we represent use this vital resource for their education and research and are
79 opposed to its closure.

80 Respectfully Submitted,

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83 Lani Lin-Kissick '28

84 *Member of the Environmental Committee, Student Assembly*

85 Eeshaan Chaudhuri '27

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Student Assembly

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