

DISCOVERING
NEW WAYS TO LEARN

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

NOVEMBER 23, 2020



A LETTER FROM OUR **DIRECTOR**

In this strange and stressful year, PRI has worked hard to fulfill its mission while also staying operationally & financially sustainable.

AS THE PANDEMIC BEGAN, our staff pivoted toward online content, which has long been a programmatic strength, and focused on improving, revising, reorganizing, and creating new educational content on our brand new website. We have been able to expand our offerings to all of our varied audiences, from K-12 students and teachers to informal educators to undergraduates and professors. We launched two major online projects – a new exhibit on Climate Change, and our new resource for Earth science education, Earth@Home. These have been well-received and our overall online usage has more than doubled.

The Museum of the Earth reopened to the public in early August, and visitor numbers have been good. Although the Nature Center lodge remains closed to the public, we have made small but important improvements to the grounds, which have continued to attract visitors. Our staff – both those working

mostly at home and those working mostly on-site – have dealt with the pandemic with creativity and resilience, and we have avoided significant layoffs.

Our Collections staff completed a major 4-year project funded by the National Science Foundation to digitize all of our fossils from the Cenozoic Era (the last 65 million years) from the west coast of the Americas, and we received several major specimen donations, including historic collections from Smith College and Dartmouth College.

Our research activity remained strong despite the many other demands on the staff, as did our teaching at undergraduate and graduate levels at Cornell University.

While we are preparing to remain in “pandemic mode” for some time to come, we are also focused on a number of important positive developments we expect in the coming year, including expansion of our collections and library space, opening a new exhibit on women in paleontology, and major steps to improve our financial stability.

Now more than ever, PRI’s mission of carrying out and communicating Earth science is vital to a healthy society and planet. We are reminded that the year PRI was founded – 1932 – was also a year of stress and challenge, and that the Institution has transcended many obstacles since then, made possible by the support of those who believe in what we do.

– **Warren Allmon**, Director



**Now more than ever,
PRI’s mission of carrying out and
communicating Earth science is
vital to a healthy society and planet.**

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

18

PEER-REVIEWED PAPERS
PUBLISHED



17,618

MUSEUM PUBLIC
VISITORS

257,353

WEBSITE VISITORS



2,459

TOTAL INTERN HOURS

4,248

TOTAL VOLUNTEER
HOURS



10,338

NATURE CENTER
PUBLIC VISITORS

12,161

TOTAL VOLUNTEER
HOURS



13

SCIENTIFIC VISITORS
TO COLLECTIONS

12,161

EDUCATION
PROGRAM
PARTICIPANTS



1,497

TEACHERS TRAINED

18

SPECIMEN
LOANS



108,527

SPECIMENS ACCESSIONED



ABOUT US

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- ▶ [Staff List](#)
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- ▶ [Donor List](#)
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Use links to
navigate for more
information.

CORNELL AFFILIATIONS

Since signing our formal affiliation agreement with Cornell in 2004, PRI has continuously strengthened its working relationship with the University.

PARTNER



Cornell students get a tour of the Prep Lab in the Museum of the Earth from Museum Education Manager Maureen Bickley.



CORNELL AFFILIATIONS

TEACHING & RESEARCH

PRI is a significant teaching resource for several Cornell programs and departments at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

In addition, a number of Cornell courses require students to participate in exercises and training at the Museum of the Earth. Our collections and facilities are regularly used by Cornell faculty, staff, and, especially, undergraduate and graduate students for both research & teaching. PRI's Director, Warren Allmon, is the Hunter R. Rawlings III Professor of Paleontology in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences (EAS), a position he has held since 2008. Three other staff hold adjunct faculty appointments in the department.



Three other staff hold adjunct faculty appointments in the department.

CORNELL AFFILIATIONS
OUTREACH

Outreach PRI continues to contribute to Cornell's historic land-grant mission by facilitating public outreach in collaboration with various faculty and departments of the University, especially with EAS, and including several projects funded by the National Science Foundation.



Partners include Cornell Earth & Atmospheric Sciences, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, & The National Science Foundation.

COLLECTIONS

PRI's collections rank among the 10 largest invertebrate paleontological collections in the United States and are the intellectual core of the Institution.

Over 7 million specimens provide a unique resource for scientific research, teaching, and exhibitions across the country and around the world. PRI's collection continued to grow throughout fiscal year 2020. Twenty-six donations, containing more than 108,000 specimens, were accessioned into the research collection. The two largest additions came from Smith College and Dartmouth College, which donated most of their historic fossil collections. These specimens ranged in geologic age from the Cambrian Period (about 542 to 485 million years ago) to today, and locations from Central New York to northern Canada to Southeast Asia.

The 4-year Eastern Pacific Invertebrate Communities of the Cenozoic (EPICC) project came to an end in July 2020. In this project, funded by the National Science Foundation, PRI was part of a partnership of eight natural history museums across the country which sought to digitize all of their fossil specimens from the Cenozoic Era (the past 65 million years) from the west coast of the Americas, from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego. PRI cumulatively digitized 332,007 specimens, photographed 12,713, and captured data on 1,453 localities. Although the pandemic affected physical work within the collections themselves, we have been able to keep our staff and some of our volunteers engaged in digitization projects.

PARTNERS



Twenty-six donations, containing more than 108,000 specimens, were accessioned into the research collection.

RESEARCH

Since its founding in 1932, research has been a fundamental part of PRI's institutional activity and identity.

Today, PRI's scientific staff & affiliated students from Cornell pursue primary research in a variety of areas related to the history, diversity, and evolution of life, including how to use paleontological information to address contemporary environmental challenges.



[Click here to view staff & student research papers online.](#)

SCIENCE COMMUNICATION GOING VIRTUAL

2020 began with the completion of a completely new website. Actually we launched three separate but tightly-linked websites to serve our diverse audiences: one for the Museum of the Earth, one for Cayuga Nature Center, and one for PRI as a whole. These modern, mobile-friendly websites have greatly expanded our ability to communicate key information with our visitors and the scientific community, as well as provide us with the opportunity to efficiently distribute learning resources for teachers, share staff essays via our blog, and present museum exhibits in an online format.

An example of the latter is the online version of the “Bees! Diversity, Evolution, Conservation” physical exhibit, which will now be preserved online and remain accessible long after the actual exhibit comes down. Updates to the main PRI website have also allowed us to revitalize our online store, providing a simpler shopping experience for our customers.



[Click here](#) to visit the online version of our latest exhibit.

SCIENCE COMMUNICATION

ONLINE RESOURCES

For most of PRI's history, "science communication" occurred almost exclusively through our publications, most of which are technical, scholarly works aimed at a narrow community of professional paleontologists.

Over the past 25 years, however, we have aimed to reach broader communities through the development of resources designed to help students, their teachers, and the wider public learn about the Earth and its history. Increasingly, we have been sharing these resources online instead of in print, a trend that was greatly accelerated in 2020 by the Covid-19 pandemic and the needs of educators whose classes are now online.



We greatly expanded our virtual resources for students & teachers.



SCIENCE COMMUNICATION

TEACHER RESOURCES

In addition to our new organizational websites, we also launched Earth@Home in August 2020. Earth@Home is a new website designed to help anyone learn about the Earth where they live. The website also features a free Earth science textbook and a virtual toolkit of online resources for teachers, ranging from Virtual Fieldwork Experiences to interactive 3D models of fossil specimens from PRI's collections.

Much of the content for EarthHome is being redeveloped from PRI's successful Teacher-Friendly Guide to Earth Science and Climate Change series. Earth@Home will take several years to complete, but new content will be added and shared on a regular basis.



[Click here to visit Earth@Home](#), a virtual teaching resource.



SCIENCE COMMUNICATION

TEACHER RESOURCES

PRI's [Digital Atlas of Ancient Life](#) website had its most successful year yet, reaching tens of thousands of visitors from nearly every country on Earth. The Digital Atlas provides resources to help people identify fossils and learn about ancient life.

Its [Digital Encyclopedia of Ancient Life](#) and virtual collection of over 500 3D models of fossils became especially popular when many college-level paleontology courses went fully online in spring 2020.



[Click here](#) to visit our website to explore our latest virtual resources.

EDUCATION

To adapt to the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic and to accommodate many classrooms moving online, PRI found various ways to adapt engaging educational materials for the virtual world in 2020.





EDUCATION

CLIMATE CHANGE

For more than a decade, climate change has been the focus of a considerable portion of PRI's educational outreach.

This continued and accelerated in FY20, as we developed the content and design of a major new climate change exhibit for the Museum of the Earth (opening in FY21) and [PRI website](#). PRI already had extensive online resources on climate change, including the [New York Climate Change Science Clearinghouse](#) and [Teach Climate Science](#), all of which are summarized and linked to in the Climate and Energy section of our new website. Among online programming developed in response to pandemic, we developed a video series [In the Greenhouse: Exploring Climate Change](#) and another series on phenology [Trees Awake!](#).



We developed the content and design of a major new climate change exhibit.

EDUCATION

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change was also the focus of PRI's teacher professional development program over the past year.

PRI staff have long worked with educators throughout the region and nationally, this year through partnerships with organizations such as the Master Teacher Program of New York State, Penn State Center for Science and the Schools, and Prince George's County Public Schools (MD). We also offered free stand-alone webinars for educators. PRI continued to promote national dissemination of its *Teacher-Friendly Guide to Climate Change*, for which we received the National Center for Science Education's Friend of the Planet award and the Museum Association of New York's Award of Merit.



We continue to promote our *Teacher-Friendly Guide to Climate Change*.

EDUCATION

KIDS DISCOVER THE TRAIL!

As a member of the Discovery Trail, Museum of the Earth provides every first grade class in all Tompkins County school districts, a total of over 800 students, with a look into local paleontology and geology with fun, hands-on activities at the Museum through the Kids Discover the Trail (KDT!) program.

PARTNERS



[Click here](#) to learn more about our Kids Discover the Trail! Program.



EDUCATION

KIDS DISCOVER THE TRAIL!

This past year the Cayuga Nature Center's KDT program made its shift away from our ropes course, which was officially retired.

All but one of our 5th grade school programs were transitioned to a digital platform due to the Covid-19 pandemic. With the transition to a digital platform & hands-on nature of our program we narrowed our theme and were able to pre-record our lessons. Students learned about wilderness skills that could be useful for them in their outdoor adventures while also touching on several NYS learning standards. They were encouraged to replicate the presented activities at home, and teachers were given several post-trip options.

In April 2020, in response to children being at home during the pandemic, PRI staff mailed a packet of educational activities for elementary-school aged children to each of our Young Naturalist Access Program members. The packet included activities that children could do outside and indoors, and spanned themes of fossils and paleontology, nature and outdoors, and climate science and energy. One parent of a recipient told us "Thanks for the snail mail mailing!! The kids love it!!!! We don't have a printer so this has been very helpful." We also created Adventure Packs for young adventurers looking to explore nature and climate science. These consisted of five unique kits which included materials and information to complete fun, self-guided learning activities. We offered each YNAP member a pack of their choice at no cost.



We converted our hands-on programming to be available via online video lessons.

MUSEUM

BEES! DIVERSITY, EVOLUTION, CONSERVATION

September 27, 2019 – December 2020

This temporary exhibit, designed in collaboration with Cornell entomology professor Bryan Danforth, has been extremely popular, both in-person and online. The physical exhibit in the Museum was extended to the end of 2020.

Because of the pandemic, the Museum closed to visitors from March 13 to August 1, 2020. The Museum reopened three days/week, with enhanced cleaning and spacing protocols. Visitor numbers have been good and steady.

PARTNERS



The physical exhibit
is extended through
the end of 2020.

Photo: Courtesy of Jon Reis

NATURE CENTER

PRI's Cayuga Nature Center cultivates awareness, appreciation, and responsibility for the natural world through outdoor and environmental education.

The live animal ambassadors, interpretive exhibits, and miles of trails through 120 acres of woods, open fields and gorges build knowledge, spark curiosity, and stimulate awareness of the importance of conservation. The Nature Center is critical to PRI's goal to create premier educational resources for teaching and learning about evolution and the impact of climate change on the fauna and flora of Central New York.

Each year thousands of people are reached through public programs,

school programs, and camps. The Nature Center hosts 800 Tompkins County 5th graders each year who participate in the Center's outdoor and animal educational program as part of the Kids Discover the Trail! Program.

The Nature Center lodge remains closed due to the pandemic, but the grounds have been open, and a steady flow of visitors have enjoyed the trails and outdoor exhibits, and out connection to the Black Diamond Trail which connects Ithaca to Taughannock Falls State Park.



NATURE CENTER **SUMMER CAMP**

For more than 30 years, Cayuga Nature Center summer camp has provided environmental and outdoor education experiences for hundreds of campers each season ranging in age from 3 to 16 years old, many of whom have returned to the camp year after year, in part because of the high quality of the experience and our veteran staff.

Nature Center camp staff and educators excel at bringing to life the camp curriculum, which offers a wide variety of enriching educational experiences, including utilizing the outdoors as a platform to engage campers in meaningful experiences suited to a multitude of different learning styles. For many of the campers, finding success in learning not only builds their knowledge of the natural world, but also helps them build confidence during their time at camp. Summer camp 2020 was cancelled because of the pandemic.



[Click here to view camp blog posts from past years.](#)





NATURE CENTER

YOUNG NATURALIST ACCESS PROGRAM

The Young Naturalist Access Program (YNAP) provides youth in need (aged 5 - 17) free access to either a week of summer camp at the Nature Center and a one-year YNAP Youth Membership to the PRI and both of our public educational venues. YNAP provides young people and their families/caregivers all of the benefits of a regular PRI membership plus free access to all of our ticketed events, such as Maple Fest and local Fossil Field Trips.

In 2019, YNAP scholarships covered the cost of an Explorer week for 99 campers. With no summer camp in 2020, we have tried to serve our YNAP families by offering some free in-person programs at the Nature Center and mailing packages of educational materials.



[Click here to learn
about The Young
Naturalist Access
Program.](#)

NATURE CENTER

HENRY A. SMITH WOODS

Henry A. Smith Woods is a 32-acre old-growth forest located just outside of Trumansburg, New York.

It is one of the largest remaining flat tracts of old-growth forest in Central New York. This small but spectacular place, with its enormous trees, dense forest canopy, and never-plowed ground, is a glimpse into the past.

A walk through this small forested area may be the closest one can get in the region to experiencing a landscape that European settlers first witnessed. Old-growth forests are important both ecologically and culturally, providing a unique habitat and

embodying local history. Sadly, these forests have declined every year since European settlement of the continent. According to the Old Growth Forest Network, only 1% of original forests in the Northeast US remain. Named for its last owner, Henry Atterbury Smith (1822-1891), this undeveloped forest fragment was left to the Village of Trumansburg in 1909 to be preserved "in its natural state and for educational and recreational purposes". In 2007, ownership of this forest was transferred to Cayuga Nature Center, and PRI remains committed to preserving the integrity of the forest in keeping with the original intent of the trust. Smith Woods is open to the public year round.



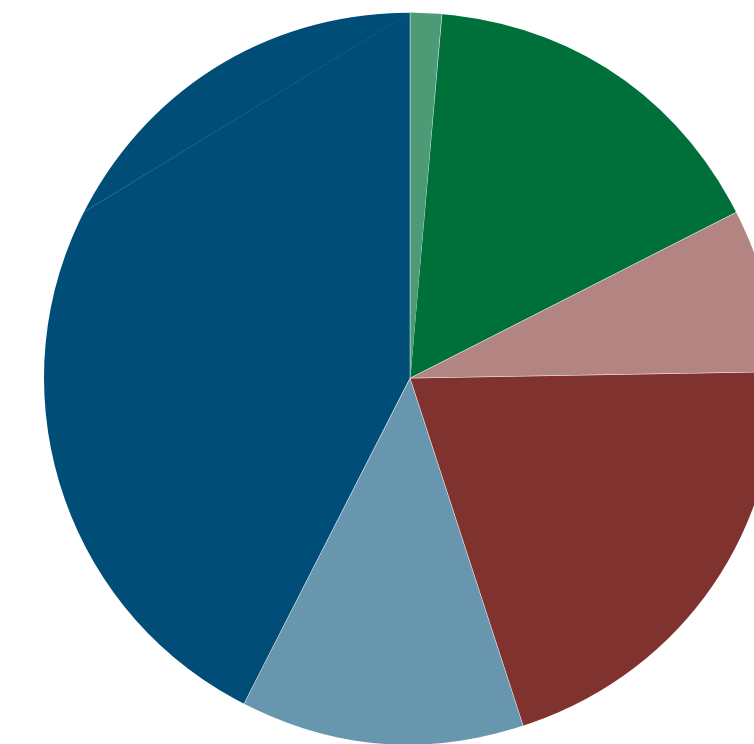
Smith Woods is one of the largest remaining flat tracts of old-growth forest in Central New York.



FINANCIALS 2020

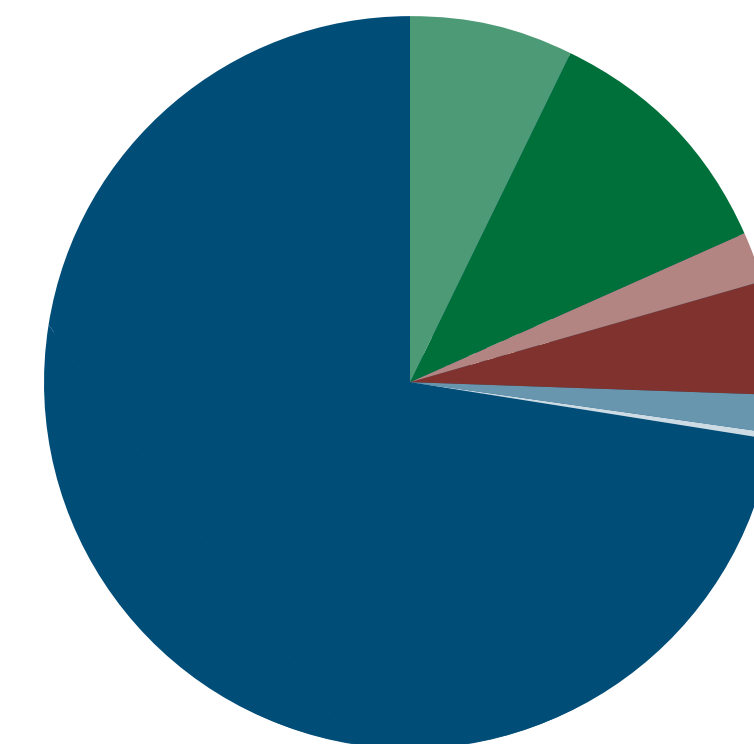
Due to the pandemic, the annual audit has been postponed; these are unaudited financials.

REVENUE \$2,988,166



Other Revenue	\$45,696
Earned Revenue	\$480,451
Funds Functioning as Endowment	\$217,246
Grant Revenue	\$603,100
Gifts Released From Restriction	\$376,890
Unrestricted Giving & Membership	\$1,264,783

EXPENSES \$2,756,183



Building and Maintenance	\$203,399
Other Expenses	\$306,539
Professional Fees	\$64,033
Interest Expense	\$131,407
Grant Subcontract Expenses	\$48,568
Exhibit Expenses	\$10,582
Payroll & Related Benefits	\$1,991,655

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Devonian Society **\$5,000–\$9,999**

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Ithaca, NY 14850
(607) 273-6623

Museum of the Earth

1259 Trumansburg Road
Ithaca, NY 14850
(607) 273-6623

Cayuga Nature Center

1420 Taughannock Blvd
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Henry A. Smith Woods

8825 Falls Road
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AFFILIATIONS

