



# Meeteetse Museum District

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September 3, 2026

To: The Meeteetse Museum District Board of Directors

From: The Director of Collections / Executive Director and the Collections Committee

Re: Proposal for Temporary Collections Acquisitions Moratorium

The Collections Department of the Meeteetse Museums is proposing a Temporary Moratorium for collections acquisitions. Per the Collections Management Policy Section VIII on Deaccessioning, a year moratorium on incoming accessions to deal with a large deaccessioning project may be declared by the Board following a written request from the Collections Manager (Director of Collections), Director (Executive Director), and the Collections Committee. A survey of Collections Committee members on the viability of instituting a Moratorium was taken in May 2026 with 6 in favor or willing and 1 not in favor.

The large backlog of collections processing has existed since before the previous Collections Manager's tenure (2012-2016). Collections processing includes cataloging, photographing, numbering, and properly storing an artifact (per the Collections Management Policy and Collections Procedures Manual). The influx of new donations on top of unprocessed older donations (and old loans to resolve) has created the backlog necessitating this moratorium. The added work of updating and creating new exhibits and securing the building structures has also slowed progress. Only one staff member's work focuses on the time-consuming processing of collections: the Director of Collections, whose other responsibilities as Executive Director greatly limit the time available for this work. This limited staff availability inherently increases the time needed to fully catalog, house, and store collections.

In addition, the collections storage areas are nearly full. This contributes to cataloging and accession delays as staff work to find space to store collections. Some of the objects in storage are old loans waiting to be processed, whether to be donated or returned. The time provided by the moratorium will allow collections staff to catalog new accessions, reconcile and catalog previous accessions, process old loans, and deaccession objects that do not fit our mission or are in poor condition.

In the Bank Museum's 2026 Historic Preservation Assessment, staff learned that the second floor's framing beams have been creeping and shifting over time.<sup>1</sup> The recommendation is to significantly reduce the load of the second floor – which is the primary storage of the Museums.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Assessment is for internal planning and research purposes for board and staff. It is available upon request.

<sup>2</sup> Without an inventory including the weight of collections currently in storage, the assessor was unable to provide a specific weight or number of units to be moved. The recommended weight limit is 40-50 pounds per square foot; this is roughly equivalent to any shelving 3-4 feet tall, with a goal of typical office space furniture and storage only.

The need to move some of the collections to the temporary Belden Dress Exhibit space or the Annex further necessitates the pause of acquisitions while storage is reworked and plans for updates are made. As the Annex is also very full, this will likely mean purchasing high density storage shelves in the Annex in addition to the deaccession work in the coming years.

The mission of the Meeteetse Museums is to promote discovery and learning by collecting, preserving, and interpreting Meeteetse's natural, cultural, and artistic heritage. Objects have been previously accepted that do not fit this mission or are in such condition that they do not add to the collection of Meeteetse's heritage. A deaccession project is being planned to implement the necessary refining of the collection during this moratorium to provide better conditions for the items that do exemplify the mission.

The Temporary Moratorium, if approved, will go into effect **January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2027** to finalize accessions currently up for discussion, approval, or dismissal by the Collections Committee. It will also serve as a "New Year's Resolution" for the Collections Department to focus on cataloging and relieving storage pressures. For items of exceptional historic value to the mission of the Meeteetse Museums, all attempts will be made by the Director of Collections, with the assistance of the Collections Committee, to provide for their acquisition, even if that acquisition is delayed. The proposed Temporary Moratorium will be renewed annually and lifted when deemed appropriate by staff and the Meeteetse Museum Board.

A long, difficult consideration and multiple, extensive workloads have led to this proposal's creation. This decision was made after consultation with other Curators of Collections and Registrars who have also made the difficult decision to enact a temporary moratorium to better serve the museum and its community. Because of their presentation and reasoning at these institutions (the City of Greeley Museums in Greeley, CO and the Campbell County Rockpile Museum in Gillette, WY), feedback from the public has actually been understanding and fairly positive. We believe careful presentation of this Temporary Moratorium by the Director of Collections, with help from the Public Outreach and Engagement Director and the Board of Directors, would mean the Meeteetse community is just as supportive and understanding.

New museum collections theories on processes, values, purposes, and (real-time) costs of collections care inform museum professionals about the changing nature of collections stewardship in the field. More museums are focusing on quality over quantity of collections, conducting deaccession projects to free up space, focus their collections, and prioritize stories and educational value of objects in multiple disciplines. The Meeteetse Museums need to move forward in this direction if we are to continue to properly care for the collections placed in our trust.

Continuing to accept material faster than the Museums can properly document, house, preserve, and interpret that material conflicts with the Museums' responsibility as a steward of the collections. With this Temporary Moratorium of incoming accessions, the staff and Collections Committee hope we can return to more timely cataloging, housing, and storing of collections as well as faster turn-around on potential acquisitions.