

## **Kirk Johnson Named President and CEO of the Denver Museum of Nature & Science**

*Smithsonian museum director brings national leadership and deep knowledge of the Museum to its next chapter*

**DENVER (Oct. 1, 2026)** — The Denver Museum of Nature & Science Board of Trustees has appointed Kirk Johnson, Sant Director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History since 2012, as the Museum's next president and CEO. Johnson's first day as president and CEO is Feb. 1, 2027. George Sparks will remain president and CEO until he retires at the end of January 2027.

At the Smithsonian, Johnson leads one of the Smithsonian's most visited museums and oversees the world's largest natural history collection, nearly 149 million specimens and artifacts. The museum welcomes 4 million visitors annually. During his tenure, it opened the David H. Koch Hall of Fossils – Deep Time, a major exhibition connecting the history of life on Earth with humanity's future.

The Board chose Johnson for the experience he brings to the Museum's next chapter. He has guided a major scientific institution, stewarded globally significant collections, served millions of visitors and made complex science accessible to public audiences. He also knows this Museum and Colorado deeply.

"Kirk is both well known to this Museum and respected on the international stage," said Jena Hausmann, chair of the Museum's Board of Trustees. "He has spent 14 years leading one of the world's great natural history museums, and that experience is exactly what our next chapter calls for. We are excited for the expertise he'll bring as he guides the Museum into its future."

Johnson spent more than two decades at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science before leaving in 2012, rising to chief curator and vice president of research and collections. He co-led the landmark Snowmastodon excavation near Snowmass Village.

"The Denver Museum of Nature & Science shaped me as a scientist, a science communicator and a museum leader," Johnson said. "I am delighted to be coming home, and I am excited to reunite with the people who make this Museum so extraordinary."

Johnson has written 17 books and presented many television documentaries, including the NOVA programs "Making North America," "Polar Extremes" and "Ice Age

Footprints.” He is a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He earned a bachelor’s degree from Amherst College, a master’s degree from the University of Pennsylvania and a doctorate from Yale University.

“Kirk was an extraordinary colleague and scientific leader here, and watching him lead the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History has been a source of great pride,” said George Sparks, the Museum’s president and CEO. “He knows this place, he knows this community and he has continued to grow as a leader. I can think of no one better prepared to guide the Museum’s next chapter.”

A selection committee chaired by trustee Rick Ambrose, who will become chair of the Board of Trustees, led a comprehensive national search with support from Spencer Stuart and evaluated candidates against the Board’s approved leadership criteria.

“Our committee set out to find a leader who could honor everything this Museum has built and guide it into its next era,” Ambrose said. “Kirk brings a rare combination of deep roots here and proven international leadership.”

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### **About the Denver Museum of Nature & Science**

The Denver Museum of Nature & Science is the Rocky Mountain region’s leading resource for formal and informal science education. Through exhibitions, programs, research and collections, the Museum helps people understand, appreciate and value the natural world. The Museum is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums and receives support from the citizens of the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District. Learn more at [dmns.org](https://dmns.org).