

Hollister Herbarium Strategic Plan 2026 to 2031

Collections research education and public engagement plan

Administrative unit	Department of Biology, College of Arts and Sciences
Policy owner	Director and Curator, Hollister Herbarium
Approval authority	To be confirmed by the Department of Biology and Tennessee Tech
Effective date	June 1, 2026
Review cycle	Review progress annually and revise the full plan by 2031

Executive summary

HTTU preserves more than 45,000 plant specimens with major strengths in Tennessee and the southeastern United States, especially the Eastern Highland Rim and Cumberland Plateau. From 2026 through 2031, the herbarium will concentrate on completing specimen documentation, improving physical stewardship, increasing responsible access, and building sustainable support for teaching, research, conservation, and public programs.

Mission

The mission of the Hollister Herbarium is to facilitate botanical education, support research on the flora of Tennessee and the southeastern United States, and aid conservation of rare plants in Tennessee. HTTU develops student expertise through collections-based research and mentorship, engages the public through botanical education, and preserves specimen evidence for future generations.

Vision for 2031

By 2031, HTTU will be a well-documented, safely housed, accessible, and actively used university collection. Its specimen records will be substantially complete and discoverable online; its care will be guided by current policies, pest monitoring, and emergency planning; and its programs will connect Tennessee Tech students, researchers, agencies, educators, and the public with the botanical history and biodiversity of the region.

Relationship to Tech Tomorrow

HTTU is part of the Department of Biology in the College of Arts and Sciences. This plan supports Tennessee Tech's four Tech Tomorrow goals without reproducing the full university plan: Education for Life, Innovation in All We Do, Exceptional Stewardship, and Engagement for Impact.

Goal 1: Education for Life

Provide meaningful collections-based education, research, and mentorship for Tennessee Tech students and lifelong learners.

Objective	Actions through 2031	Measure
Student training	Use databasing, curation, field documentation, georeferencing, imaging, taxonomy, and outreach as supervised learning experiences.	Track participating students, hours, courses, presentations, and completed products annually.
Research mentorship	Support undergraduate projects, graduate research, and interdisciplinary use of specimens.	At least two substantive student research or curation projects each academic year, subject to staffing.
Public learning	Offer tours, online exhibitions, talks, workshops, and accessible alternatives when the collection room cannot accommodate a visitor.	Document programs, audiences, accommodation requests, and participant feedback.

Goal 2: Innovation in All We Do

Transform skeletal specimen records into complete, reliable, reusable digital data.

Objective	Actions through 2031	Measure
Complete databasing	Transcribe full labels, standardize collector names, verify dates and geography, and record determination history.	Complete or review the remaining skeletal records; report annual number and percentage.
Georeferencing and imaging	Prioritize Tennessee, rare plants, historical specimens, research requests, and records with high reuse potential.	Track records georeferenced, imaged, and reviewed each year.
Data publication	Maintain regular publication through SERNEC and GBIF and connect specimens to people, publications, sequences, and annotations.	Publish at least annually and monitor errors, downloads, citations, and returned research data.

Goal 3: Exceptional Stewardship

Protect the physical and digital collection and establish sustainable support for its care.

Objective	Actions through 2031	Measure
Storage and preservation	Replace or add appropriate cabinets, improve archival supplies, address overcrowding, and document condition priorities.	Annual cabinet, housing, backlog, and condition assessment.
Risk management	Implement the collection management, IPM, emergency, access, loan, sampling, and digital data policies.	Annual policy check; monthly pest checks; annual emergency exercise and contact update.
Capacity and funding	Seek stable university support, grants, gifts, partnerships, student employment, and documented in-kind contributions.	Track annual operating support, external funding, student labor, and unmet needs.

Goal 4: Engagement for Impact

Use HTTU collections and expertise to support research, conservation, agencies, educators, and the public.

Objective	Actions through 2031	Measure
Research access	Respond to qualified visitors, loans, images, data requests, and approved sampling.	Track requests, turnaround, loans, visitors, resulting publications, and data citations.
Conservation partnerships	Support Tennessee rare-plant work, floristic inventories, and appropriate information needs of agencies and land managers.	Document projects, specimens added, data products, and partner outcomes.
Public visibility	Maintain an accurate website with exhibitions, policies, collection information, accessibility information, news, and ways to participate.	Review website twice yearly and publish at least two substantial updates or exhibitions annually.

Implementation priorities

Period	Priority work
2026 to 2027	Implement core policies; establish baseline counts; confirm emergency contacts; begin cabinet and supply improvements; define complete-record workflow.
2027 to 2029	Scale label transcription, quality control, georeferencing, imaging, student training, accessible programming, and data publication.
2029 to 2031	Complete highest-priority data backlogs; assess collection condition and research use; secure continuation support; evaluate outcomes and draft the next plan.

Annual review

The Director and Curator will prepare a brief annual summary for the Department of Biology covering collection growth, backlog, digitization, conservation, pest activity, access, loans, sampling, student participation, public programs, research outputs, funding, and major risks. Targets may be adjusted through documented departmental review when staffing, funding, facilities, or university priorities change.

Continuity with the 2019 plan

This plan carries forward the 2019 commitments to inclusive student mentorship, complete digitization, external support, public outreach, and collaboration with researchers and natural-resource agencies. It adds measurable stewardship, accessibility, data-quality, and risk-management objectives needed for the next phase of collection development.