Split decisions: A Herbarium Specimen Conservation Project

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Many herbaria have some experience curating mixed sheet specimens. These specimens are comprised of two or more specimens mounted on the same sheet, that are either the same species or not, but often have different collection numbers and can also be from different collecting locations. It was often practiced in the past to save resources, especially when supplies were expensive and limited. Mixed sheets pose interesting challenges for curatorial staff, data entry technicians and researchers. Filing these specimens in the main collection can be difficult, especially if the specimens have different determinations or are from different locations. One must choose a specimen on the sheet to file the entire sheet under and then create a cross reference for the other specimens on the sheet. As we are rounding our 3.5 millionth digitized specimen, when entering data for mixed sheets, our data management team must create individual records in the database for each specimen on the sheet and then cross-reference the records. The challenge for researchers, those annotating and/or borrowing specimens, is that they must indicate which species goes to which annotation. Often by including an A and B, or a 1 and 2, on the sheet next to the specimen and on the annotation label. Usually when these specimens are found in the main collection or returned from being on loan, we place them in a designated specimen repair cabinet; eventually to be dismantled, split, and remounted onto separate herbarium sheets. This summer we conducted a pilot project and processed 180 mixed sheets. We created a nine-step workflow to help us organize and maximize efficiency. As with most projects in an herbarium, the amount of time needed is always more than initially expected. This poster will provide details about the preparation, organization, and our approach to remount mixed sheets.