



Commission of Animal Control and Welfare

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The Commission of Animal Control and Welfare unanimously voted on March 18, 2008 to recommend that the Board take immediate action to convene hearings to address animal welfare, management and oversight problems at the San Francisco Zoo. Below is a summary of the Commission's findings and recommendations. In brief, the Commission recommends that the Board focus hearings on the need to:

- Make animal welfare the priority at the zoo by guaranteeing that future expenditures are spent on meaningful improvements to conditions for animals before additional visitor amenities or new animals are brought into the zoo.
- Reform zoo management, oversight and accountability through the creation of a board-appointed "Zoo Oversight Commission" focused on ensuring animal welfare at the zoo.
- Transition to a rescue zoo, expanding on the concept of the rescue of Grizzly bear cubs last summer.

Unfortunately there is no shortage of exotic species, including big cats, in need of placement after being rescued from inhumane private ownership situations. Zoo visitors who value seeing these exotic species will not be deprived of that experience with the transition to a rescue zoo. Indeed, because the histories of individual rescued animals can be posted alongside exhibits, visitors can readily identify with and care about the animals, enhancing the visitor experience.

The Commission bases these recommendations on our review of recent expert analyses of animal exhibit conditions, the Zoo Master Plan Update 2007, the 2000 Zoo Performance Audit, and an accounting of zoo expenditures and renovations made to date. Commissioners visited the zoo within the last month to observe conditions of the animals and their exhibits for ourselves. We heard public testimony at three separate meetings about citizen concerns about animal welfare at the zoo. Although the Commission formally and in person invited Zoo management to participate in all three public meetings, the Zoo declined, stating that the busy schedules would not allow for their attendance.

The Commission has grave concerns for the future direction of the Zoo. The 2007 Master Plan Update calls for the Zoo to become an accredited botanical garden, build new visitor amenities including an enclosed "galleria," cafés, a Zoo Tram, conference center and amphitheater. Furthermore, the Commission is concerned that current oversight of the Zoo is inadequate to protect animal welfare. For example, the January 2000 Performance Audit of the Zoo, prepared by the Budget Analyst for the Board, noted several instances where animals lived at the Zoo in substandard enclosures. In particular, the audit called attention to problems with the bear grottos. The audit said about the bear grottos: "Ten to fifteen years is too long to address deficiencies of the existing habitats."(p.1). Eight years later, the Zoo has done nothing for the polar bears.

The Commission would like to acknowledge the dedication of the Zoo's animal keepers who do what they can to enhance the lives and the well being of animals in their care. Our concerns lie with the Zoo management's priorities and ineffective oversight of the Zoo management.

The Commission urges the Board to take prompt action on this pressing matter. Please do not hesitate to contact Commissioner Andrea Brooks at 415.786.6934 if you have any questions on this matter.

Respectfully submitted on March 20, 2008, on behalf of the Commission of Animal Control and Welfare,

Andrea M Brooks, Commissioner

**Additional Information About Animal Welfare Concerns at the San Francisco Zoo
submitted by the San Francisco Animal Control and Welfare Commission**

The Current Situation:

- Visitor Experience: The San Francisco Zoo has made great strides to improve upon the visitor experience and amenities and has invested millions of dollars to do so. Nevertheless, ongoing animal welfare deficiencies at the zoo detract from the visitor experience. (See below.)
- Visitor Safety: In light of the recent tiger-mauling at the zoo, a peer review panel has been established to make recommendations to improve upon visitor safety.
- Zoo Keepers: The zoo keepers, those responsible for day-to-day animal care, are recognized for their dedication and love of the animals, doing what they can to enhance the lives and well-being of the animals in their care.
- Animal Welfare: There are significant animal welfare issues concerning the living conditions and exhibits for many of the animals. These concerns have been pointed out, documented, and discussed for years but have not been addressed by zoo management. The conditions for the animals at the San Francisco Zoo are grossly outdated and have been described sad and inhumane.

Commission Actions:

- The Animal Control and Welfare Commission heard testimony at three meetings that raises concerns about the welfare of the animals at the Zoo. We have attached letters from three Zoo experts outlining their concerns about animal welfare at the Zoo and a DVD showing current substandard conditions for some animals.

Commission Recommendations:

Make animal welfare a priority at the Zoo. Future expenditures should be spent on meaningful improvements to conditions for the animals before additional visitor amenities.

- The 2007 Master Plan Update from the Zoological Society (attached) includes plans for the Zoo to get accreditation as a Botanical Garden, further develop a conference center, family activity areas and create a 1,000-seat amphitheater, build a new café, restaurant, tram system, parking and entrances. The Commission is concerned that this diffusion of purpose and resources will have a negative impact on animal welfare as animal exhibits compete with “entertainment” attractions for scarce funds.
- The 1999 Performance Audit of the Zoo, prepared by the Budget Analyst for the Board of Supervisors stated: “If the sea lions and northern bears are to remain at the zoo, the existing facilities should be removed and new state-of-the-art exhibits constructed within the Phase II [by the end of 2004] time-span. Otherwise, the animals should be relocated to other institutions with better facilities. . . . 10-15 years is too long to address these concerns.” It has been eight years since the Audit, and the polar bears remain in the same deficient conditions.
- The 1999 Performance Audit adds: “The most glaring deficiencies in housing and exhibit design, because they do not provide natural environments and/or are limited in space, are facilities for the chimpanzees, orangutans, elephants, bears, sea lions, hippopotami, giraffe, and siaming. All, with the exception of the northern bears and sea lions, are scheduled for new facilities within Phase II (by the end of 2004) of the Zoo Master Plan.” While elephants and sea lions are both no longer at the Zoo, the Zoo canceled the new orangutan and chimpanzee exhibits that were originally identified as targeted for improvement with the 1997 bond measure funds. With the exception of the new grizzly bear exhibit, the bears have not undergone any meaningful renovation; additionally the grizzly cubs are still young and may eventually require a larger area. The hippopotamus has actually been moved to an arguably worse exhibit; the siamang were moved to a larger, but equally inappropriate, cage. In the eight years since the Audit report, little has been done to address the identified exhibit deficiencies, while much has been done to address visitor amenities. To do nothing and allow these substandard conditions to continue says that the City of San Francisco finds them acceptable.
- Dr. Joel Parrott, Director of the Oakland Zoo, provided a evaluation of Animal Management at the San Francisco Zoo for the 1999 Performance Audit. He reported: “The outdated animal enclosures and exhibits are the greatest concern of the general public.” Visitor surveys, cited in the Performance Audit, included a question about what one thing visitors would like to see changed at the Zoo. There were a wide range of suggestions, but the most frequently mentioned suggestions (29%) were directed toward “providing improved habitats for certain animals or all of the Zoo’s animals in general.” Dr. Parrott added that, in his opinion: “Improvement in animal exhibits will drive attendance up (and therefore zoo revenue) more than any other project.”

- The 1999 Performance Audit further said: “As the financial responsibilities shift to the SFZS, this strain carries with it the need for revenue from the gate, concessions, and fundraising. This need for revenue shows up in the programs... and capital improvements (Little Puffer, roller coaster). Complicating this is the honorable burden of paying staff salaries at the high end of the profession... It is important that animal welfare issues not be overshadowed by these other zoo needs... The priority of projects and time of construction be rearranged so that the new animal exhibits are constructed first.” This recommendation was not heeded and instead new entrances, gift shop, café, conference centers and other visitor amenities were constructed before substantial new animal exhibits.
- The 1999 Performance Audit noted: “[t]he weather at San Francisco Zoo is at the cooler limit for keeping many tropical species. New outdoor exhibits should be designed with ample windbreaks, outdoor shelters, and on-exhibit heat sources. Animal collection should be carefully selected, as much as possible, for an animal’s ability to acclimate to cooler temperatures, or select species that originate from cooler climate zones. . . .” These recommendations have not been followed. The new African Savannah exhibit was located in the most weather-exposed part of the zoo, and constructed without shelter or windbreaks for the warm-weather animals displayed there. In fact, the most sheltered part of the African Savannah exhibit was designed for the human visitors, leaving the animals who live there exposed to the cold wind and fog off the ocean just across the street. In addition, the zoo continues to make plans to acquire more animals (such as jaguars and koala bears) that hail from tropical climates.
- The 1999 Performance Audit noted that the budget for the Capital Projects then under construction included an \$800,000 allowance (2% of \$40 million construction costs) for the Public Art Program. The Audit added that: “In a zoo, the exhibition of animals takes precedence over the over the exhibition of art.” The Board should consider exempting Zoo capital projects from the Public Art Program, to ensure as much money as possible will go to improving exhibit conditions.

Reform Zoo management, oversight, and accountability through the creation of a Board-appointed “Zoo Oversight Commission” focused on ensuring animal welfare at the Zoo.

- Current Zoo management and oversight regarding animal welfare is inadequate. Members of the Joint Zoo Committee and the Recreation and Park Commission ask few questions of Zoological Society representatives. The current monthly meetings of the Joint Zoo Committee are scheduled to last roughly one-half hour which does not afford appropriate time for possible issues and public comments. A review of Joint Zoo Committee minutes indicates the cursory nature of the oversight provided.
- In the 1999 Performance Audit, Dr. Joel Parrot said: “The outdated animal enclosures and exhibits... were the driving force for the success of the [1997] bond measure vote and should be moved to a top priority for the bond program.” Only two significant new exhibits were built using bond money (African Savannah and Lemur Forest). Promised improvements, such as new chimpanzee and orangutan enclosures, were not made. It’s evident that capital improvements from the bond measure focused on visitor amenities, not improvements for the animals. The Joint Zoo Committee and Recreation and Park Commission did not provide adequate oversight to ensure capital improvements made with bond money focused on animal enclosures and exhibits.
- Zoo Oversight Commission (ZOC) will be mandated to review all Zoo capital improvements from the standpoint of animal welfare needs. ZOC approval will be necessary for all Zoo capital improvements and animal dispositions and acquisitions. Focus of the ZOC will be:
 - Ensure animal welfare remains the top priority of the Zoo. Plans to change the focus of the Zoo away from animals to a botanical garden, increased conferences and events, etc should be given a lower priority than animal welfare concerns, if not abandoned outright. Creating humane habitats for all animals at the zoo and providing increased enrichment for all animals should be the Zoo’s highest priority.
 - Ensure the Zoo creates appropriate enclosures for all the animals it has now (or finds homes for them elsewhere) before bringing in new animal species.
 - Ensure that future enclosures provide meaningful improvement to the conditions of animals through building exhibits as large and complex as possible.
 - Ensuring Animal Keepers can devote their time to taking care of the animals, and provide increased enrichment for the animals, in consultation with animal behaviorist specialists on staff, and are not doing routine maintenance of exhibits.
- Members of the “Zoo Oversight Commission” will be appointed by the Board of Supervisors, and could include the following people: representatives of animal welfare organizations with experience dealing with Zoo issues, Zoo animal keeper, veterinarian and animal behaviorist (both with experience dealing with Zoo animals), financial expert with experience dealing with budgets and necessary department representatives.

Transition to a rescue zoo, expanding on last summer’s rescue of Grizzly Bear cubs.

- At a rescue (or sanctuary) zoo, new Zoo animals come from rescues of exotic and other species currently in inhumane private ownership or other situations (as was done with the grizzly bear cubs last summer). There are huge numbers of exotic species (including big cats) in private hands that should not be. The Zoo can provide a home for them when they are “rescued” from their unfortunate circumstances. Zoo visitors will still see big cats and other species that are perennial crowd favorites.
- The rescue Zoo concept could grandfather in species currently part of endangered species breeding programs. As such, the Zoo’s conservation efforts would continue.
- The Zoo should consider developing a wildlife rehab center at the Zoo, in conjunction with local wildlife rescue groups such as the SF Rescued Orphaned Mammal Program (ROMP). Zoo veterinarians and staff have experience dealing with sick and injured wild animals and the Zoo is a natural fit for this center. The Rehab Center, funded separately and not from General Fund monies, would be able to respond to rehab emergencies such as the Cosco Busan oil spill.
- The concept of a rescue zoo opens possibilities of new educational opportunities: highlighting the story of each animal, how/why they were rescued and what fate their species has in the wild.