

Smithsonian Institution

Joint Statement

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Hearing on National Zoo Collections Stewardship

Committee on House Administration

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Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee to testify about the Smithsonian National Zoological Park and the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute and our stewardship of our important living collection of animals, and our research and conservation efforts in support of our mission to save species from extinction. In 1889, Congress directed the Smithsonian to create a national zoo in the District of Columbia “for the advancement of science, the instruction and recreation of the people.” Now, 125 years later, the National Zoo cares for more than 1,800 animals representing 297 species from all over the world, many of them critically endangered.

Stewardship of Collections

Our collective staff works hard to build and grow our reputation as a leader in our profession, especially regarding animal welfare issues and the safety of our staff and visitors. As stated in our strategic five-year plan, human safety and animal welfare are our top priorities in every aspect of our mission. In support of those priorities, we created internal and external processes that test and reinforce our commitment to excellent animal welfare and safety. These priorities are not something that we compromise, and I would like to make clear that the fiscal year 2013 sequester did not impact animal care.

Over the last decade, we expanded the role of the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee beyond the statutory requirement of inspecting research animals. Today, this committee covers all animals at the National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute. We use the resources of the United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service on both a formal and informal basis to get their advice, guidance and support for independent evaluation of our animal facilities, processes, policies and practices. We work with the United States Occupational Safety and Health Administration to evaluate and test our safe work practices. On an annual basis, the National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute staff works closely with the Smithsonian Office of Safety, Health and Environmental Management to complete a detailed review and inspection of all facilities on both campuses for safe working conditions. With the Smithsonian Safety Office, we have instituted Zoo- and Institute-wide Job Hazard Analyses; these department-specific Analyses are posted in all work areas and

reviewed annually with all staff in the area. We believe this Job Hazard Analysis process is a leading best practice in our profession.

We enthusiastically participate in the accreditation process of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). This accreditation process, completed every five years, covers all aspects of modern zoological practices at the highest standards in the world. I am pleased to tell you that we were just reaccredited in September of 2013. Following a year-long process, the five-day accreditation inspection of the Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute by a team of four non-Smithsonian zoological professionals focused heavily on both animal welfare and on human safety. The recommendations of an AZA inspection team are always taken very seriously by Smithsonian leaders. We act on them immediately. Moreover, Smithsonian and Zoo leaders encourage and support the active participation of our staff in AZA animal and safety programs. Dozens of National Zoo staff spend many hours every month as animal program studbook keepers; animal population management committee members, advisors and chairpersons; species survival plan committee members, advisors and chairpersons; taxonomic advisory group members and advisors; Association committee members and chairpersons, including the Association special safety committee; Accreditation commission members and chairpersons; and participation on the Association board of directors. This investment in the national and global management of captive species enables the National Zoo to help set the research and conservation agenda for our profession, and insures that animals and species are available to the National Zoo and SCBI, now and in the future for research and, in some cases, for reintroduction to the wild.

As part of the Smithsonian Institution, the National Zoological Park and the Conservation Biology Institute rely on Federal appropriations for the vast majority of our funding needs. Under the leadership of Secretary Wayne Clough, the National Zoo leadership team has worked hard to reduce our dependence on Federal appropriations by creating and growing three alternative funding sources: Private and government grants and contracts, especially to fund conservation biology research efforts; Philanthropy from private and corporate donors, especially for specific exhibitions; and Earned income, especially from sales of food, merchandise, parking and other activities enjoyed by visitors to the National Zoo. These non-Federal sources of income supplement our Federal support, but they cannot replace it. I am pleased to report that all three of these alternative sources of revenue have grown over the last four years.

With all this good news to share, we are also mindful of the animal welfare issues that were discussed publicly at the end of 2013. In 2013, a volunteer notified the Zoo Director and the Associate Director of Animal Care Sciences of her concerns about animal welfare decisions in the Cheetah Conservation Station department of the Zoo. Under my direction, the Facilities subcommittee of the Zoo's Animal Care and Use Committee looked into these concerns. The subcommittee investigated the volunteer's concerns and found that many had merit. The subcommittee made 25 recommendations for changes to processes, procedures and staffing. We are grateful that these issues were brought forward, and the recommendations have led to improvements across the Zoo. Twenty four of the recommendations were already being implemented at the time the concerns were made public. Some of the problems that arose reflected some staffing imbalances that, while temporary, did put stress on the system. The decisions that led to staffing imbalances were made by me and the National Zoo leadership and in

recognition of the problems that arose, I ordered the implementation of a three-part program to insure animal welfare and human safety called “Slow Down – Speed Up (hiring) – Rebalance (keeper workload)” in December 2013. As part of the Slow Down aspect, unit managers were given the authority to suspend for 90 days all non-husbandry and non-safety activities of animal keepers, veterinary and nutrition staff. The non-critical functions include research support and/or public engagement activities such as keeper talks, behind-the-scenes tours, and optional non-Zoo outreach committee assignments. With the support of Smithsonian leaders, the Zoo and Smithsonian human resources staff have given high priority to filling vacant Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute animal keeper, biologist, curator, veterinary and nutrition positions. As a result, seven new animal care hires or promotions have been completed and ten additional recruitments are now in process. Finally, senior curator staff is undertaking a workload analysis of keeper and biologist duties, to ensure that animal care and safety duties are in balance with public outreach duties, research time and training needs. That analysis is in process.

Leadership Strategies

The National Zoo and its Conservation Biology Institute play a crucial role in one of the Smithsonian Institution’s four grand challenges: “Understanding and sustaining a biodiverse planet.” In 2013, the leadership of the National Zoo adopted a five-year plan entitled “Our Plan to Save Species,” much of our testimony today is based on that plan. The plan is published on the Zoo’s website at http://nationalzoo.si.edu/AboutUs/Mission/NZP_Our_Plan_to_Save_Species.pdf. Our current efforts to achieve our ambitious plans include three leadership strategies:

Saving species through science: Building on our past successes and leveraging the unique scientific resources of the Smithsonian Institution, we are advancing the discipline and practice of conservation biology. Our current focus is on seven key disciplines are: Animal Reproduction, Husbandry, and Welfare; Endangered Species Conservation and Reintroduction; Wildlife Health and Emerging Animal Diseases; Animal Movement and Migratory Connectivity; Biodiversity Genomics, Forensics and Evolutionary Genetics; Biodiversity Monitoring and Assessment; and Climate and Carbon Science. The Smithsonian is an important leader and innovator in each of these areas.

Over the last decade, the Smithsonian National Zoological Park and Conservation Biology Institute have made many significant discoveries, breakthroughs and contributions to conservation biology and saving species. Critical breeding successes have included the giant panda, Sumatran tiger, Micronesian kingfisher, dama gazelle, Przewalski’s horse, black footed ferret, clouded leopard, sloth bear, Andean bear, African lion, cheetah, Cuban crocodile and kiwi. Discoveries have included the identification of the elephant herpes virus which may be the cause of one-third or more juvenile elephant deaths around the world; the Chytrid fungus which is causing an extinction threat to as many as one-third of all frog species on the planet, and breakthroughs on cryopreservation of gametes of important species ranging from elephants to pandas to sea-corals. Scientists from the Conservation Biology Institute operate in 25 countries around the world, working closely with colleagues from the State Department, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, US Department of Agriculture and States’ Agricultural veterinarians, the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to identify barriers to

conservation, including foreign animal disease threats, zoonotic disease, habitat loss, human/animal conflict and more.

With the support of the Congress, the Administration and private and corporate donors, the leaders of the National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute have completed almost a quarter of a billion dollars of upgrades and renewals to the facilities at both the Rock Creek and Front Royal campuses. Visitors now experience award-winning new exhibits such as American Trail for seals, sea lions, bald eagles, wolves and Elephant Trails, where three more elephants will join our herd. Staff, visitors and animals are safer with the upgrade of fire protection and security systems. Visitor amenities are vastly improved to accommodate growing numbers. Most importantly and core to our mission, new breeding facilities for cheetah, clouded leopard, red panda, kiwi and more were constructed, enabling us to understand and save these important species. Using non-Federal resources, the Zoo has made a multi-million dollar upgrade of its restaurants; added a solar powered carousel celebrating endangered species -generating about \$500,000 per year for the Zoo's mission; and we are in the process of upgrading Zoo parking at minimal cost to the Federal budget.

With the strong leadership of the Smithsonian Regents, and the stability of multiple funding streams (including Federal funding), the National Zoo and its Conservation Biology Institute are well-positioned to continue to make significant, important contributions to our Mission to save species from extinction and understand and maintain biodiversity on our planet.

Informal education and great visitor experience: Survey data demonstrates that the Zoo is the favorite Washington-area destination for families with children. We use this leadership position to deliver an effective, efficient and informal education message for learners of all ages. We coordinate our conservation and science education with current grade K-12 STEM curriculum. Using both Federal and private funding, we are modernizing our exhibits and animal care infrastructure for both efficiency and effectiveness. In the last ten years, we invested more than \$250 million to make our exhibits and infrastructure better for animals and our visitors, while reducing energy and resources expense. Finally, we use Federal and private resources and technology to expand our reach to national and international audiences. Taxpayer dollars fund a large portion of our exhibit construction, and have made possible major renovations such as the Panda House, Seal and Sea Lion pools and Elephant Conservation Center. Unique assets like the 'panda-cam,' sponsored by the Ford Motor Company Fund, engage millions of virtual visitors around the globe and educate them about our important conservation efforts.

Training the next generation: For decades, the National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute have provided training for people who now assume important leadership roles around the world. Over 6,000 undergraduates, graduates and professionals have trained in key elements of conservation biology in Smithsonian facilities and dozens of affiliated countries. The latest successful manifestation of this effort is the Smithsonian-Mason School of Conservation on the 3,200 acre Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute campus in Front Royal, Virginia. The new, \$25 million LEED-Gold certified school campus was built by leveraging Federal funds with State of Virginia financing as well as private donations. Enrollment in undergraduate and graduate and professional courses is growing. The multi-purpose facility is becoming financially self-sustaining, as it can be used to host meetings, retreats and internal

seminars for other Federal and State agencies, private companies and groups. Through our strong partnership with the Zoo's membership organization, Friends of the National Zoo, our award-winning summer and school vacation camps and classes grow in popularity, optimizing revenue opportunities and providing financial support. Finally, with Smithsonian support and resources from the Friends of the National Zoo, we continue to build exciting, impactful educational engagement programs through both social media outreach and our website, which we are working to rebuild.

Conclusion

The National Zoo's highest priority will always be the welfare and safety our visitors and staff and of the animals in the collection, and we maintain the highest standards to ensure that. Federal and private support enables the National Zoo to be a leader in collections stewardship, scientific research, visitor education and professional training. Thank you for the opportunity to tell you about the great work we do.