

Testimony

of

**JIM MADDY
PRESIDENT & CEO
ASSOCIATION OF ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS**

before the

COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

on

**The National Zoo of Today and Tomorrow - an Innovative Center Focused on the Care and
Conservation of the World's Species**

April 2, 2014

Thank you Chairwoman Miller and Ranking Member Brady for the opportunity to testify before the Committee today about the AZA accreditation process.

My name is Jim Maddy and I am the President and CEO of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). Founded in 1924, the AZA is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of zoos and aquariums in the areas of conservation, education, science, and recreation. AZA's 224 accredited zoos and aquariums annually see more than 182 million visitors, collectively generate more than \$21 billion in annual economic activity, and support more than 204,000 jobs across the country. Over the last five years, AZA-accredited institutions supported more than 1,000 field conservation and research projects with \$160,000,000 annually in more than 100 countries. In the last 10 years, accredited zoos and aquariums formally trained more than 400,000 teachers, supporting science curricula with effective teaching materials and hands-on opportunities. School field trips and programs annually connect more than 15,000,000 students with the natural world. This is very important as a recent National Research Council study found that people learn as much as 90% of their science in informal settings such as AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums.

AZA and its member institutions work in concert with Congress, the Federal agencies, conservation organizations, the private sector and the general public to conserve our wildlife heritage. In particular, AZA and its member institutions have a long-standing partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Our collaborative efforts have focused on:

- Engaging in endangered species recovery and reintroduction (For example: black-footed ferrets, California condor, Mexican and red wolves, whooping cranes);
- Supporting multinational species conservation funds and state wildlife grants; and
- Collaborating on partnership opportunities involving wildlife refuges, migratory birds, freshwater fisheries, illegal wildlife trade, amphibians and invasive species.

At the heart of the AZA's mission is its accreditation process, which ensures that only those zoos and aquariums that meet the highest standards can become members of the AZA. The AZA accreditation process is a rigorous, unbiased, and lengthy evaluation involving self-evaluation, on-site inspection, and peer review. The standards are continuously evolving and getting stronger as we learn more about the needs of the animals in our care.

AZA accreditation helps to develop public confidence through a thorough, measured, and documented audit that establishes whether an institution meets or exceeds current professional standards as established by the AZA. This is accomplished by a periodic comprehensive review and site inspection conducted by zoological experts in operations, animal management, and veterinary medicine. Once granted, AZA accreditation is a publicly recognized badge signifying excellence in, and commitment to, animal management and welfare, veterinary care, ethics, physical facilities, staffing, conservation, education, safety and security, finance, and supportive bodies. Conversely, denial of accreditation should lead to improvements in identified areas and a concurrent increase in cooperation and support from governing bodies and other organizations.

Accreditation looks at all aspects of a zoo's operations, including:

- animal care including living environments and daily enrichment
- veterinary programs - including preventative medicine
- financial stability
- risk management
- conservation education programs
- conservation efforts
- safety for animals, staff, and visitors
- staffing levels and training of staff
- governing authority
- guest services

Each institution that goes through accreditation does so with the understanding that the process is confidential. In keeping with that standard operating procedure, I want to briefly describe how the overall AZA accreditation process works. First, the AZA carefully selects the expert Accreditation Commission members who evaluate each zoo and aquarium. These experts are leaders in their fields and have many years of experience and education in zoo and aquarium operations, animal management, and veterinary medicine. There are twelve experts on the Accreditation Commission.

The Accreditation Commission evaluates every zoo or aquarium to make sure it meets AZA's standards for animal management and care, including living environments, social groupings, health, and nutrition. The Accreditation Commission also ensures that animals are provided with enrichment, which stimulates each animal's natural behavior and provides variety in their daily routine.

The Accreditation Commission evaluates the veterinary program, involvement in conservation and research, education programs, safety policies and procedures, security, physical facilities, guest services, and the quality of the institution's staff. Because a zoo or aquarium needs a strong foundation in order to continue to meet high standards, accreditation also evaluates each institution's finances, its governing authority, and its support organization.

Every candidate for accreditation fills out a detailed questionnaire which includes copies of their policies, procedures, records, lists, and reports. The application takes many months to complete and six months to study and evaluate. After the Accreditation Commission studies the application, a team of inspectors visits the zoo or aquarium in person. Each team includes at least one veterinarian along with animal and operations experts.

The inspectors spend several long days at the zoo or aquarium visiting every area, interviewing staff, checking records, and examining the physical facilities and the animal collection. The inspectors then write a detailed report about everything they saw and evaluated and submit it to the Accreditation Commission.

The Accreditation Commission meets twice a year to consider all candidates for accreditation. They examine the application, the supporting documents submitted by the zoo or aquarium, the

inspection team's report, and any information and comments received from outside organizations and individuals.

The zoo or aquarium's senior officials must go to the Accreditation Commission's meeting to answer questions. Finally, the Accreditation Commission decides whether or not to grant accreditation. It does not matter if an institution is new or was previously accredited, standards are high and not every candidate receives accreditation.

AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums are constantly evolving and standards are continuously being raised. Each zoo or aquarium must keep up with these changes to remain AZA-accredited. To prove it, they must go through the entire accreditation process every five years, and they are expected to meet the AZA accreditation standards every day. AZA believes that nothing is more important than assuring the highest standards of animal care and our accreditation process is the best way to accomplish that goal.

Accreditation is what differentiates AZA institutions from other holders of wildlife - fewer than 10% of the approximately 2,800 animal exhibitors licensed by the United States Department of Agriculture are AZA accredited. AZA-accreditation and certification is mandatory for all AZA member organizations. Once earned, it confers best-in-class status, an important message for local, state, and federal government and the visiting public.

I want to conclude by saying that The National Zoo is highly respected both by the AZA community and the public for its leadership in scientific research and commitment to conservation. It is unique among AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums in that it truly belongs to all Americans by virtue of being a member of the Smithsonian family. I also want to commend Dennis Kelly for his outstanding leadership at The National Zoo. Dennis is a member of the AZA Board of Directors and is an expert voice on a range of issues, including conservation and safety, within the AZA community.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important matter, and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.