

Report

from

Elephant Committee

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to

Alaska Zoo

Board of Directors

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Report from the Elephant Committee

The question of what is best for the elephant at the Alaska Zoo is similar to questions being asked at many animal institutions around the world. This report is presented to the Board of Directors of the Alaska Zoo with the acknowledgement that this issue generates strong and diverse opinions in our community; and with respect for the opinions of everyone who genuinely wants what is best for Maggie and the Zoo.

Previous Report

The previous report to the Board, provided last November, reviewed the zoo's Mission Statement, objectives, strategic plan, core purpose and values, and the charge given to the Elephant Committee. That original charge was to: "provide the Board, in six months or less, with adequate information to make a sound decision regarding Maggie's future, with consideration to both Maggie's and the Zoo's best interests." This committee was formed in May 2003 and consisted of Dr. Riley Wilson, Mr. Pat Lampi, Mr. Tex Edwards, Ms. Dorothea Lovejoy, and Mr. Mike Barker. The committee has regularly met over the past 12 months, and initially established ground rules and the protocol for gathering information from recognized experts and other interested parties. Decisions by the committee were determined by a consensus of at least 80% of the members. Mr. John Seawell has replaced Ms. Dorothea Lovejoy on the committee.

As stated in the previous report, the committee has met with and/or received information from:

- Dr. Ron Tilson – Minnesota Zoo, Director of Conservation
- Ms. Diana Weinhardt – Houston Zoo, Curator of Large Mammals
- Mr. Charlie Gray – African Lion Safari (Canada), Elephant Manager
- Dr. Debbie Olsen – Indianapolis Zoo, Elephant Manager
- Dr. Jim Oosterhuis – San Diego Wild Animal Park, Head Veterinarian
- Mr. Alan Rookcroft – formerly SDWAP, international consultant
- Mr. Scott Riddle and Mrs. Heidi Riddle – Riddle's Elephant and Wildlife Sanctuary
- Dean Treichel - The Edmonton Zoo, Director
- Ms. Penelope Wells and Dr. Paul Joslin, Friends of Maggie

The specific points presented by each of these individuals can be found in the previous report.

Summary of Points from Experts

- Elephant experts (people with decades of hands on experience with elephants) have a high standard of care they believe should be considered when deciding what is best for Maggie.
- The issue of whether an elephant should live in Alaska doesn't seem to be as important as the actual quality of life – socialization with other elephants, exercise, behavioral enrichment, size of enclosure and type of surface to walk on, etc.
- The cost of providing the quality of life is a strong consideration – where will the zoo spend limited resources?
- All of the experts agreed that as a general guideline, Maggie should be with other elephants, but one of them said keeping Maggie in Alaska was a viable option.

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- The two experts who know the Alaska Zoo and Maggie best are split in their opinion about her future:
 - Jim Oosterhuis believes Maggie could stay in Alaska, if we have a plan to provide:
 1. Exercise – probably with a treadmill
 2. Softer floor in her building – a major health concern for captive elephants is foot, leg and conformation problems. These have all been attributed to living on hard surfaces. Softer surfaces are needed – dirt or rubber.
 3. More people to provide more behavioral enrichment (16 hours/day)
 - Alan Roocroft believes there is only one option – move Maggie to a suitable facility Outside (not many are up to his specifications – maybe River Banks, or the North Carolina Zoo.) Mr. Roocroft subsequently expressed concern about moves made without due consideration given to good elephant management.

Summary (from previous report)

- Some believe that Maggie is “happy” here and won’t be as “happy” anywhere else.
- Most experts believe that the answer to the question “What is best for Maggie and the Zoo?” is a new home for her in a warmer climate, with other African elephants, more financial resources, and professional management.
- Maggie could stay in Alaska if we invest in improvements in her management.
- We can not afford to have a herd of elephants – the additional revenue will not pay for the additional costs.
- We will want to retain ownership of Maggie in any case. She may need to return to Alaska if a transfer is attempted and fails. All costs of the move(s) should be paid by the other institution.

Interim Decision

In December 2003, four members of the Elephant Committee recommended and the Board of Directors agreed to the following steps:

The Committee will investigate if there is better home for Maggie, acknowledging that we may not find one or that the transfer may not work. The committee will look for an institution that has clearly demonstrated that they have experience with this situation, and are able to:

- Move an elephant safely
- Provide the resources to successfully manage an elephant herd – providing first class medical care, aerobic exercise, soft flooring, behavioral enrichment, etc.
- Introduce an elephant like Maggie to other elephants
- Pay to move her from Alaska to their institution, and back to Alaska or to another institution that we agree to; if it is agreed the transfer cannot succeed.
- Accept that Maggie will continue to belong to the Alaska Zoo.

It was agreed that no public communication should be made until the Board makes a final decision.

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The Committee agreed to investigate fourteen elephant facilities that had been recommended by one or more of the experts we had interviewed. After further reviewing those fourteen institutions, the list of prospective homes for Maggie was reduced to eight. A set of questions was then sent to these eight institutions. The Committee then agreed to the relative weighted scores that would be assigned to each question (see below). Five of the institutions completed the questionnaire. The responses were reviewed by the Committee and the institutions were each assigned a total score. All five committee members, independently, gave the highest score to the same institution, the North Carolina Zoological Park in Asheboro, NC.

The Choices for the Board

The Committee recommends that the board choose between two options for our African elephant:

- Maggie should remain at the Alaska Zoo, with improvements made to the elephant exhibit per Dr. Oosterhuis's recommendations.
- Maggie should be moved to the North Carolina Zoo at Asheboro NC (www.nczoo.org).

Pros and Cons

The pros and cons of keeping Maggie at the Alaska Zoo:

Pros:

1. Maggie remains at a location that she knows, with a management system she is familiar with.
2. The community continues to enjoy an icon of the zoo.
3. The zoo retains one of the attractions that make it distinctive.

Cons:

1. Our management system is limited to our resources and training. We are currently unable to do basic health management procedures.
2. We are in tension with our mission and one of our educational messages.
3. The zoo must invest scarce resources for an animal that may or may not be with us long term.
4. Maggie, a cycling female of an endangered species, will not contribute to her gene pool by bearing young.
5. It will be increasingly difficult for the zoo to negotiate with AZA zoos with a single elephant at the zoo. This could hurt our mission – as it relates to Amur tigers, snow leopards, polar bear, future exhibits and other issues.
6. Maggie will not experience any benefits from social contact with other African elephants.
7. Keeping Maggie alone in Alaska will never be forgiven if she dies at an early age or of a condition that may not have occurred in a superior institution or more favorable climate.

The pros and cons of moving Maggie to North Carolina are:

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Pros:

1. NC Zoo has experience introducing aggressive female African elephants to other African elephants.
2. Maggie would be the 5th female African elephant, with plans to have 10.
3. NC Zoo has substantial acreage for elephants, with a year 'round climate that is more suitable to her species.
4. NC Zoo has an amazing level of education and experience in their staff
5. Maggie could potentially breed and contribute to her species.
6. The Alaska Zoo will have the opportunity to educate our supporters about the decision, how we made it, and the good reasons for it.

Cons:

1. Maggie is moved to an unfamiliar setting, a situation that will be stressful for some period of time.
2. The Alaska community may be, initially, disappointed; and revenue may reflect that disappointment.
3. There are substantial risks associated with a female elephant bearing young in a non-herd setting (without the experience and "training" of other females in the family group.)
4. There is some risk of injury during the long trip to North Carolina.

The Opinions of the Elephant Committee

The elephant committee voted 2, 2, and 1 on the choices. Two favored Alaska, two voted for North Carolina, and one was undecided.

Mike Barker

Mike recommends that Maggie be moved to North Carolina in the summer of 2005. This is what's best for both Maggie and The Alaska Zoo. It will give Alaskans a year to say goodbye to Maggie and both zoos the time to make all the necessary preparations for the trip. The overwhelming evidence provided by experts indicates that keeping a single breeding age female African elephant in Alaska is unacceptable. The public will understand the need for Maggie to spend the rest of her life with other elephants, without resulting in a noticeable financial impact on The Alaska Zoo. The Anchorage Daily News poll supports this. Over seventy five percent of the poll's respondents voted for Maggie to move outside to be with other elephants. While there are improvements that can be made for Maggie at The Alaska Zoo, these are only a short term solution and are only delaying the inevitable. Eventually, as she ages, we will not be able to provide Maggie the comfort and care she needs. In the event she is crippled or beyond breeding age, it will be difficult to place her in a top quality institution like the North Carolina Zoological Park. This will never be an easy decision, but the present is the best time to make this decision. Moving Maggie to a world-class facility where she can spend the rest of her life with other African elephants is a proactive step that can enhance The Alaska Zoo's image. This would make a clear statement about the priority we place on each animal's well being. We once recognized this twenty years ago when Annabelle was a lone elephant and the Zoo made the conscious decision that Annabelle needed a companion. Why is Maggie any different? Moving Maggie to the North Carolina Zoo presents

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us with a public relations opportunity – to tell Maggie’s story. Maggie would always remain a part of The Alaska Zoo and we could provide updates in our newsletter and on our web site. We could even set up a web cam with the North Carolina Zoo and display it in our new front entrance facility.

Tex Edwards

Tex entered the process with no firm conviction and was impressed with the strength of the expert’s opinions that Maggie should not be alone – their arguments are very logical and persuasive. However:

1. Maggie is healthy now. “Happiness” is a condition that is difficult to assess in animals; but Maggie’s current condition dictates that the burden of proof must be on whether a move to another facility will have a good chance of improving her life.
2. Alan Roodcroft was one of the most militant in expressing that he could not condone keeping elephants alone. However, he wrote an email to an animal rights group, in defense of the Alaska Zoo, which indicated that there could be worse things for Maggie than where she is now.
3. Maggie has an independent personality and has only known this life. Those facts significantly raise the risk associated with a move.

Tex voted for Maggie to remain in Alaska – with three strong caveats:

1. Maggie is healthy now, but if she develops a medical condition that would be alleviated by a different climate or other winter housing she should be moved as soon as possible.
2. The Alaska Zoo’s retention of Maggie is dependent upon providing her approximately \$150,000 worth of improvements (estimated – no one has actually built an elephant treadmill or trained an elephant to use one.) The board will need to provide those improvements in a timely manner without delaying the necessary improvements to the Seal/Otter exhibit and the kitchen/clinic. Do we have the financial resources to do it all? We cannot have competing fundraising campaigns in this small town – the zoo must be represented by one coordinated management team.
3. If the Board decides that Maggie is to stay in Alaska, it needs to do so understanding that this issue will not go away. Even in Alaska there has been a shift in attitudes about what is acceptable management for animals. The zoo has heard concerns, from families and from classrooms, about Maggie that would not have been expressed as loudly in the past.

Pat Lampi

Pat voted to move Maggie to North Carolina. The question was: “Is there a better place for Maggie?” All of the experts believed that Maggie should be with other elephants; and that she could be successfully moved by people who know what they’re doing. Maggie’s intelligence and North Carolina’s experience integrating an aggressive African female indicates that her move to NC would be successful.

Maggie is a cycling female of breeding age. As a rule once females reach an age of 26 to 28, if they have not been bred they stop cycling. Delaying a move may cause her reproductive

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biological clock to run out. Allowing Maggie to go to another facility and have the opportunity to breed and help the propagation of her species is the responsible course of action.

There are limited resources to invest in the zoo and crucial improvements have already been delayed. It is possible to make improvements to the Alaska Zoo elephant facility and program: more staffing, better flooring for the indoor area, a larger indoor area with a treadmill, and an ERD can be provided by spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on facilities useless to any other species we have. If something should happen to her we would not replace her. How could one justify spending scarce monies on one animal that the experts say would be better off at another facility.

Our relationships with other zoos are negatively impacted by Maggie's presence – for instance the ability to borrow a male polar bear, or receive breeding tigers, or breed our snow leopards might be impacted by Maggie's presence. Our educational and conservation message is compromised by having an single cycling female elephant at the zoo. Given the facts and available information, I believe the public would understand a decision to move her. Most would applaud the thought and effort that went into the decision – even though they will miss her.

John Seawell

John believes Maggie only knows the life she has had here, and has been healthy and successful living alone. Maggie is mentally comfortable here; John votes to keep Maggie in Alaska. His comments:

"It is very probable that Anchorage and Alaska would never have had a zoo any better than Big Game Alaska if it were not for Sammye's elephant Annabelle. You all know she was the reason the Alaska Zoo happened. Since that beginning, Alaska's children, young and old, have enjoyed a total of 49 years of elephant life. 14 of those years were with two elephants, 14 with Annabelle alone (before Maggie arrived), and seven with Maggie alone since Annabelle's unfortunate death."

"Annabelle brought her foot infection with her when she came to Alaska. We were unable to rid her of that infection and it finally caused her death in 1997. Other than the infection that Annabelle brought with her, the two elephants never suffered serious illness. Maggie has enjoyed good health throughout her 21 years here. It appears that this is a healthy environment for elephants."

"I feel very strongly that the chances are less than favorable that Maggie would adjust to a herd environment. Her temperament has changed since Annabelle died; her behavior is much less aggressive and antagonistic. She likes to get all the attention. Relocated into a herd situation she will not be number one and I firmly believe she is liable to turn aggressive and difficult to manage. This would no doubt result in isolation for her. She is mentally comfortable here in the only home she has known since the herd she was born into was gunned down around her."

"Much has been said about the high cost of keeping Maggie. The zoo has successfully weathered 35 years of keeping elephants – 14 with two. In the last ten years the zoo has added

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\$3,763,000 in capital improvements. It is surely reasonable to assume that this can continue. And keeping Maggie should only make a minor dent in future capital requirements. My research into the cost of some of the things we think we should do for her show they will be much less than anticipated. Regardless, I believe too too much is being made of the elephant taking away from other zoo needs and not enough looking at the big picture - past and future."

"The best thing for Maggie is to stay here. The best thing for Riley Wilson's daughters and multitudes of Alaskan children is for her to stay here. And she is a financial asset that cannot be measured."

John also talked with several manufacturers and provided information that indicates what it might cost to purchase a squeeze chute, treadmill, and rubber floor.

Riley Wilson

Riley was unable to decide between the two choices. As a veterinarian, he believes Maggie should be moved to North Carolina. As a dad (of two young daughters), he believes she should stay in Alaska.

The Opinions of Zoo Staff

The committee asked for the opinions of the zoo team. Participation was optional, and names were not required – but we did ask folks to identify their position and tenure for purposes of evaluation. 14 people responded:

	NC Zoo	AK Zoo	Neutral
Totals	7	4	3
Keepers/Education	4	1	2

A number of persons expressed appreciation for the opportunity to address this issue and have their opinions be considered. Everyone who submitted comments signed their opinion.

Comments:

- If we improve, she should stay; if not – go. The consideration is what will have to be put on the back burner should we decide to spend the needed funds for Maggie's benefit.
- Don't add more elephants – it won't pay.
- Maggie is a very important part of the zoo, regardless of where she fits in the mission statement. The board needs to make the financial commitment to keep "Maggie." If they cannot do this then they need to make the public aware of this fact when they move her, not just tell people "we are doing what is best for Maggie." Without a financial commitment from the board, Maggie must go, because things cannot remain as they are.
- Maggie deserves the chance at a better life in a suitable climate with other elephants. She deserves to have appropriate medical care from trained professionals. She deserves to be able to forage and have exercise year round, not to run on a treadmill alone. Her life in North Carolina would far exceed

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- anything we could provide here. She is a cycling female and should have the opportunity to breed for her species.
- Keeping Maggie in Alaska involves known factors. Moving her to NC encompasses a lot of unknowns, including will she travel OK, etc... I would prefer she stay in Alaska.
 - The two goals (associated with the mission statement) stated that the zoo should be "self supporting; not striving to be ever larger and grander until it is not economically viable in this young community in our sparsely populated state." (Discussion of various elephant expenses) The (increasing) cost of keeping Maggie would contradict our goal of not becoming larger and grander in our young community. The second goal ... was for our zoo to "be a source of pride to the community, the board of directors, and the staff of the zoo." If Maggie were to be kept, it would contradict this goal in many ways.
 - The Alaska Zoo was started because of an elephant – it is part of the culture and legend of the zoo. Alaskans will revolt if the board allows a bunch of East Coast Liberals dictate what we do.
 - She brings people to the zoo. After all she is the only elephant in Alaska.
 - Maggie will do better in a warm climate and would have the chance to interact with other elephants and a larger staff. The zoo could make great improvements much faster with the money spent on maintenance and food.
 - This is a golden opportunity to step forward in the community and show people that we truly want what is best for our animals, even if it means facing our own fears of change. What are we really teaching people when they visit in the winter and see Maggie standing alone (except for one or two hours a day) in a concrete enclosure? I have heard parents say time and time again that they are sad to see her in this situation.
 - Our management is fully supportive of breeding Ahpun and snow leopards, often stating it is important to participate in the perpetuation of their species. How is Maggie and her species any different?
 - If we had to scale back our ... new Seal & Otter exhibit, it seems difficult to imagine finding money to support and implement a healthy African elephant program. ... At what cost would it come? Other projects would be forced to come to a standstill or be postponed. ... A new kitchen and clinic ... black bear and seal and otter exhibits are out of date and are the source of constant complaints from visitors. Diverting funds from native orphaned and injured animals for the sake of one exotic elephant that has been offered a home elsewhere is deplorable.
 - My preference is for any captive animal including our zoo animals to have same or like species companionship, regardless of the qualifications, abilities, or relationship to keepers.
 - Maggie's area is highly unsuitable during the winter months. ... Elephants are social creatures. Joining a herd might take time for Maggie to adjust to, but perhaps she might feel at home again with those of her own kind.
 - As much as I would hate to see Maggie leave, I think NC would be the best place for her. Even if we were able to make some improvements, we would not compare to a place with a warmer climate and other elephants. I also believe it

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would be unfair to the rest of the zoo to delay projects like kitchen/clinic; black bear, and seal/otter.