



IN DEFENSE OF ANIMALS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Rock Island County Commission Lacks Critical Elephant Welfare Information Needed For Tuesday Vote on Niabi Zoo Ticket Increase

In Defense of Animals urges tabling of vote pending elephant welfare assessment

Coal Valley, Illinois (May 17, 2010) – In Defense of Animals (IDA) is urging the Rock Island County Forest Preserve Commission to table a Tuesday vote on an increase in ticket prices at the Niabi Zoo meant to help fund a \$3 million elephant barn expansion, until it can fully investigate the health of ailing elephants Babe and Sophie. In a letter sent today, IDA asked the Commission to bring in an independent veterinarian to fully assess the elephants' health and welfare.

“To keep Babe and Sophie at the Niabi Zoo would be disastrous, considering the serious health problems they suffer from living in a small and inadequate display,” said Catherine Doyle, IDA Elephant Campaign Director. “We urge the county to make a factual assessment of the serious health and welfare problems for elephants at the Niabi Zoo, even with an expanded barn. Only after the county fully understands the grave consequences of keeping Babe and Sophie should they consider a vote.”

Outgoing zoo director Tom Stalf has publicly recommended that the elephants be moved out of the zoo, based on health concerns. IDA calls his statements “unprecedented.” The two Asian elephants suffer foot disease, caused by prolonged confinement during the long winter months in a tiny barn, with little room for movement. One elephant likely suffers arthritis. Elephants in the wild, who walk tens of miles each day, do not suffer and die prematurely from foot disease or arthritis.

“Foot disease is an extremely painful and often lethal ailment that kills elephants in zoos prematurely,” said IDA president Dr. Elliot Katz, a veterinarian. “To make Babe and Sophie spend another winter in a tiny barn at the Niabi Zoo would be cruel. They must be immediately removed from their inadequate enclosure and transferred to a sanctuary where they can walk on grass and soft soil year-round and begin to heal.”

IDA says the commission should send the elephants to a natural-habitat sanctuary, where they would live in an environment at least 100 times larger than the space the elephants now share. These facilities specialize in caring for elephants like Sophie and Babe, who spent most of their lives with the circus before coming to the Niabi Zoo.

Eighteen Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) accredited zoos have closed or plan to close their elephant exhibits, including San Francisco, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Detroit.

For more information please visit www.HelpElephants.com. A copy of IDA's letter is available upon request.

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In Defense of Animals is an international animal protection organization located in San Rafael, Calif. dedicated to protecting animals' rights, welfare, and habitat through education, outreach, and our hands-on rescue facilities in Mumbai, India, Cameroon, Africa, and rural Mississippi.