

AZA POLICIES ON ELEPHANTS
Adopted by the AZA Board of Directors
March 21, 2000

I. SHOULD ELEPHANTS BE MAINTAINED IN AZA MEMBER ZOOS?

AZA zoos that currently exhibit or desire to exhibit elephants should make every effort to maintain elephants in their collections so that they can contribute to conservation through public education, scientific research, and the support of field conservation. Elephants are an important flagship species and the cornerstone of many members' African and Asian exhibit areas.

II. COOPERATION WITH NONMEMBERS

(1) AZA institutions should cooperate among themselves to pursue self-sustainability with their elephant populations.

(2) Since self-sustainable elephant populations are not possible currently within AZA, then cooperation with outside organizations should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

(3) Institutions or individuals--either members or non-members--that do not abide by AZA and SSP guidelines for elephant management should not be considered participants in the SSP, nor should they receive any of the benefits of SSP participation.

(4) AZA zoos may provide elephants or their gametes to approved non-members on a case-by-case basis. As is currently the case, evaluation of potential non-member participants will be conducted by WCMC with input from the Elephant SSP. Since the SSP will be developing new draft guidelines for elephant management, there will be a moratorium on new non-member participants until these guidelines have been approved. In addition, current non-member SSP participants will be re-evaluated after the new guidelines are established.

III. REQUIREMENTS FOR SSP PARTICIPATION

(1) Standards should be established to govern what types of facilities, care programs and levels of cooperation and commitment will be required for future SSP participation.

(2) SSP participants should be given highest priority in future elephant dispositions, whether through breeding or importation.

IV. HUSBANDRY AND MANAGEMENT

(1) The Elephant SSP should review, clarify, and standardize all husbandry terms and guidelines for elephant care and management.

(2) All SSP participating institutions should be required to meet minimum SSP husbandry and management protocols, which could be more stringent than those required for accreditation.

(3) All institutions participating in the Elephant SSP should be required to provide detailed behavioral and medical profiles to the appropriate SSP advisor on all elephants in their care.

(4) Each holding institution should provide a written environmental enrichment and implementation plan for elephants as a requirement for SSP participation and AZA accreditation.

(5) To the extent possible, future management strategies should be based on the social biology of wild elephants. A minimum female group size should be encouraged.

(6) An active program of applied research should be encouraged and implemented at the institutional and Association level to solve various pressing husbandry challenges.

(7) AZA will not require that members adopt a particular management philosophy, but will encourage empirical evaluation and develop performance guidelines for both protected and free contact management systems. The AZA recognizes the recent trend toward protected contact management, and encourages members to evaluate protected contact or any approach to management that both minimizes the risk to keepers and provides for the physical and psychological well-being of elephants in zoos.

V. ELEPHANT RIDES

In the interest of safety, AZA strongly encourages members to discontinue public elephant rides.

VI. BULL MANAGEMENT

(1) Since a self-sustaining North American elephant population is a goal, then all new and renovated elephant facilities should be bull compatible. Breeding centers should be established, either at institutions capable of holding multiple bulls or as regional centers. The feasibility of cooperative bull holding facilities should also be studied.

(2) All bull and protected contact facilities should be required to have an elephant restraint device. All other facilities should work toward obtaining a restraint device.

VII. STAFFING

All elephant program managers should be strongly encouraged to attend the Principles of Elephant Management Course at the AZA Schools for Zoo and Aquarium Personnel and all elephant keepers should also be strongly encouraged to attend.

VIII. ACCREDITATION

AZA Elephant Care and Management Standards should be improved and enforced.

IX. IMPORTATION FROM RANGE COUNTRIES

- (1) All elephant imports must be approved within the AZA Elephant SSP.
- (2) Use periodic importation as a way to maintain population viability in the North American Elephant SSP population.
- (3) When acquiring elephants for the SSP, first consider captive animals in substandard conditions in North America, then captive animals outside the U.S., then wild animals surplus to the needs of the managed population or those to be captured or killed because of human-animal conflicts (especially those that are going to be killed).
- (4) An effort should be made to assess the potential for cooperating with sister organizations, such as the European Association of Zoos and Aquariums (EAZA).
- (5) The SSP and participating institutions will employ a combination of breeding and importation with the goal of eventually creating a self-sustaining population.

X. FIELD CONSERVATION

All elephant holding institutions are strongly encouraged to contribute to relevant research and field conservation projects.

XI. PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION AND OVERSIGHT

The AZA Elephant SSP should be reclassified as an SSP/TAG with both population management and collection planning responsibilities.