

Tulsa Zoo Elephant Program – Mission Statement

As a team we will strive to insure safety conscience attitudes and actions, while providing the greatest level of care to our elephants, thus ensuring their physical, mental and emotional well-being. Through this we will actively promote conservation, education, breeding and research to the betterment of both captive and wild members of their species.

The Tulsa Zoo & Living Museum as an accredited AZA facility will demonstrate its level of commitment to the AZA Elephant TAG/SSP in the following ways:

*NOTE – Italics represents current Tulsa Zoo & Living Museum Elephant Program objectives.

- Enhance population sustainability through institutional carrying capacity
 - SSP participants that are breeding facilities will strive to hold 6-12 elephants, with capabilities for 2 or more males
 - Other SSP participants will strive to hold 2-6 elephants, with capabilities for all males

The Tulsa Zoo & Living Museum currently houses 1.2 Asian elephants in our collection. We currently have holding space capable of housing 1.3 + offspring comfortably. In 2003 director, Larry Nunley, stated in a letter to the Asian Elephant Tag/SSP that the Tulsa Zoo is committed to conserving the Asian elephant and is willing to accept the responsibility of providing housing and care for a male offspring born here and if need be to do so in perpetuity. The Tulsa Zoo and Living Museum considers itself capable of becoming a breeding facility. We currently hold the most genetically valuable Asian bull in the country and in past years we have experienced a birth.

- Participate in or contribute to in- or ex- situ elephant conservation

Our Tulsa Zoo Conservation Program is currently considering a proposal to provide \$6,000 per year for elephant conservation. The Tulsa Zoo is committed to elephants both in captivity and in the wild. Our proposed dollar amount represents \$2,000 for each of our elephants equaling \$6,000 per year. At the January 2005 AZA director's meeting, conservation was stated to be the primary reason why elephants are in AZA facilities. Conservation efforts in captivity and the wild are vital to the elephant's survival. Funding requests will be subject to approval by the Conservation Committee. Project summaries and updates will be submitted to the committee yearly by either, the Large Mammal Curator or the Assistant Curator-Elephants. All projects supported will be high lighted in one or more ways: during presentations and tours, elephant encounter museum "trunk talk" bulletin board, and Tulsa Zoo web site.
- Participate in and support AZA elephant TAG/SSP research projects (includes submitting samples, responding to surveys, contributing resources)

As our facility can, we will make every effort to review proposals in a timely manner and pass them through our IACUC and AWPC committees for approval to facilitate participation. Requests for financial assistance will also be considered and reviewed by our Conservation Committee. Our elephants have been utilized in a number of surveys/questionnaires as well as research projects and we hope to continue this trend. *Our facility strives to become an active participant in elephant research programs/projects to benefit wild and captive populations.*

- **Abide by AZA elephant TAG/SSP breeding recommendations**
 Our facility will actively work with breeding recommendations as they are set forth by the TAG/SSP. We currently house two cows that are no longer considered part of the breeding population due to their ages. Both have been reproductively assessed (7/02). Our genetically valuable bull, also reproductively assessed (7/02), should remain a high priority for breeding as he is a proven breeder. Staff is currently working with him on semen collection for use as a donor bull and he was recently utilized in two artificial insemination attempts. Our staff routinely reviews and comments on breeding recommendations concerning our elephants and would very much welcome the notion of receiving an additional cow (preferably young and reproductively assessed) into our collection, either short or long term. It is hoped that the TAG/SSP will work greatly with us in the future to reach the three cow minimum as required by AZA and as we evaluate the direction of our program.
Our facility works to assist the SSP with a progressive breeding program in hopes to propagate the Asian elephant population..
- **Promote AZA elephant TAG/SSP education messages**
 Our facility supports and encourages our staff to reinforce personally the key messages of the elephant TAG/SSP. Staff is often asked to provide behind the scenes tours of our elephant area and often conducts informal keeper question and answer sessions with our visitors. For the past three years, staff has also worked closely with our education department with their summer workshop program as we look to educate our younger future generations. We have a firm understanding that the greatest good we can do is to educate the public about the uniqueness of elephants and their importance as a keystone species in hopes that they will leave with a greater appreciation for these animals and the importance to conserve and protect them.
To become an active advocate in educating the public through presentations, husbandry demonstrations, "meet the keeper" talks, educational workshops and outreach programs; thus promoting conservation awareness through community support and participation.
- **Contribute resources to developing conservation centers**
 As AZA develops the conceptual plans and implementation phases for conservation centers in North America, the Tulsa Zoo & Living Museum is committed to assist with our professional expertise as required. Whether this entails on-site inspections of potential facilities, assisting with developing management plans for such facilities, and/or taking into consideration financial contributions for such facilities, we will strive to assist AZA in meeting their goals toward elephants.
- **Contribute resources to hiring a full time position for program oversight**
 In 2004, the Tulsa Zoo and Living Museum designated an exempt supervisory position to oversee our elephant program. The assistant curator – elephants is responsible for the daily management and supervision of the elephant area staff and our elephant collection. The assistant curator works closely with the large mammal curator to insure that the Tulsa Zoo and Living Museum can meet necessary goals: including AZA's *Standards for Elephant Management and Care*. They are also responsible for improving our methods of elephant care as well as insuring that zookeeper staff is properly trained in appropriate and safe methods to work with such large and potentially dangerous animals.

- Publicly speak and act with a unified voice

Our elephant staff is well aware of the huge draw and attention elephants generate. Our staff is familiar and up to date with what is occurring around us. They are well educated and equipped with the necessary tools to speak on behalf of their facility and charges. Our public relations department has been made aware of and will utilize the elephant mission statement adopted by AZA on all future press releases. We will also work closely with the AZA public affairs department with any matters concerning our elephants and others and it is hoped that they will do the same through TAG liaisons, press releases, list serves, etc.
- Participate in a proactive public relations campaign

As a charismatic mega-vertebrate, our elephants are one of the more popular animals in our collection. All staff is aware of this and elephant personnel are often utilized to help market and publicize the zoo. Countless interviews, behind the scene tours, and media spots have always involved our elephants. We actively promote our elephants and elephants worldwide for the wonderful creatures that they are. We highlight our accomplishments and never attempt to hide what we are and do. We work closely with our public relations department to generate positive proactive press releases concerning our elephants.
- Provide support for elephant staff to participate in AZA elephant TAG/SSP activities

The Tulsa Zoo and Living Museum is committed to staff development at all levels. Designated funding for staff travel is available to attend conferences and AZA related professional development courses. Our Conservation Program has specific staff development funding available for staff to attend AZA's *Principles of Elephant Management* course. Our goal is for every staff member of our elephant team to attend this course. All staff is given the opportunity to utilize professional leave so that they do not need to use their own vacation time to attend such opportunities. Our assistant curator-elephants serves as our facilities institutional representative (IR) to the TAG/SSP. The Tulsa Zoo and Living Museum has a history of commitment to elephants as we hosted the first "formal" gathering of elephant enthusiasts which later evolved into the Elephant Managers Association (EMA). We also hosted the 10th and 25th annual EMA conferences as well.
- Abide by AZA Standards for Elephant Management and Care

We currently meet many of the elephant standards set forth by AZA in 2001. We understand the importance of the standards to elephant management and care. We are striving to implement plans of action to rectify any items that we do not meet and have a large percentage rectified by the compliance deadline of May 2006. We also realize that the standards are dynamic and may change and evolve as knowledge of elephant management and care improves.

To meet or exceed all AZA Elephant Standards and Guidelines

