

AGENDA

Potter Park Zoo Advisory Board
1301 S. Pennsylvania Avenue ~ Lansing, MI 48912
Telephone: 517.342.2776; Fax: 517.316.3894

The Board information packet is available on-line by going to www.potterparkzoo.org, selecting "About," clicking on "Zoo Advisory Board" and clicking "February 12, 2025".

POTTER PARK ZOO ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

Wednesday, February 12, 2025

6:00 PM

1. **Call to Order**
2. **Approval of the January 08, 2025 Meeting Minutes**
3. **Limited Public Comment – *Limited to 3 minutes with no discussion***
4. **Late Items/Deletions/Consent Items**
5. **Action Items**
6. **Director's Report**
 - a. Finance Report – Cynthia Wagner
 - b. Admission Report- Cynthia Wagner
 - c. Director's Report – Cynthia Wagner
7. **New Business**
 - a. USDA & Permits Presentation – Sarah Foote
 - b. AZA DEI Update – Cynthia Wagner
8. **Old Business**
 - a. Animal Health Facility Progress – Cynthia Wagner
 - b. Fundraising Update – Cynthia Wagner
 - c. Feline Primate Renovation & Grant Update – Cynthia Wagner
 - d. Stormwater Infrastructure Federal Grant Update – Cynthia Wagner
9. **Board Comments**
10. **Limited Public Comment - *Limited to 3 minutes with no discussion***
11. **Upcoming Meeting**
 - a. **Zoo Advisory Board Meeting March 12, 2025 at 6:00 PM**
12. **Adjournment**

Official minutes are stored and available for inspection at the address noted at the top of this agenda. Potter Park Zoo will provide necessary reasonable auxiliary aids and services, such as interpreters for the hearing impaired and audio tapes of printed materials being considered at the meeting for the visually impaired, for individuals with disabilities at the meeting upon five (5) working days' notice to the Zoo. Individuals with disabilities requiring auxiliary aids or services should contact the Zoo by writing to: Zoo Director, 1301 S. Pennsylvania Ave., Lansing, MI 48912, or by calling 517.342.2776.

**MINUTES – INGHAM COUNTY
POTTER PARK ZOO ADVISORY BOARD**

**1301 S. Pennsylvania Avenue,
Lansing, MI,
January 08, 2025**

BOARD MEMBER

PRESENT: Commissioner Tennis, Commissioner Cahill, Chair Cheryl Bergman, Julie Pingston, Dr. Jack Kottwitz, Vice Chair Kyle Binkley, Dr. Richard Snider, Emily Linden, Mary Leys, Samantha Harkins and Caitlin O’Rourke

ALSO PRESENT: Cynthia Wagner, Zoo Director and Amy Morris-Hall, Potter Park Zoological Society Executive Director

ABSENT: Kasey Kent

CALL TO ORDER: Meeting called to order at 6:02 p.m.

MINUTES: The minutes were moved by Samantha Harkins and supported by Julie Pingston to approve the minutes of the October 9 and November 13, 2024 meeting as written, **Yes-11; No-0; MOTION CARRIED**

LIMITED PUBLIC COMMENT

None

LATE ITEMS/DELETIONS/CONSENT ITEMS

None

ACTION ITEMS

Resolution to Amend Resolution #24-409

Director Wagner explained this Resolution is to amend the match amount for the federal grant that was awarded for Stormwater Infrastructure improvements. The formula used to calculate the match indicates the match is \$239,938 rather than \$191,950 as previously approved. Funds are available in the zoo fund balance to cover the entire match.

Moved by Julie Pingston and supported by Caitlyn O’Rourke to support the Resolution to amend Resolution #24-409, **Yes-11; No-0; MOTION CARRIED**

FINANCIAL REPORT

Director Wagner reported the 2024 year to date financials are very preliminary as all expenses have not yet been recorded for the year. She reported the inventory amount may change as inventory will be completed next week in the AniMall. She also reported that she expects \$100,000 more in expenses in 2024. The original amount budgeted to put into fund balance in 2024 should go back into fund balance.

ADMISSION & PARKING REPORT

Director Wagner reported that admissions is up for the year, but that it is down for the month of December. She stated that general admission fluctuating slightly during the winter months does not affect revenue greatly due to decreased winter rates.

Executive Director Morris-Hall reported that the Society was evaluating the reasons for the lower Wonderland of Lights attendance. The 2024 Wonderland of Lights season had two less days than the previous year and the Toys for Tots night was held on a Sunday versus Saturdays as in previous years. The weather was likely an additional factor as it was very cold many days. Ms. Morris-Hall stated changes have already been made for the 2025 event calendar to address some of these things.

Julie Pingston asked if breaking 200,000 in admissions was a record and Director Wagner replied that to her knowledge it was the first time the zoo had been over 200,000 in total admissions.

ZOO DIRECTOR REPORT

Major Elements Reported by Director Wagner:

- The Horticulture and Maintenance Supervisor has been accepted by Jamieson Sather and he will start in March.
- Several zoo staff have accepted positions on AZA SSP committees and in Professional Development Courses.
- Seasonal staff wages increase from \$14 to \$15 in 2025. In 2024 there were 34,239 hours of seasonal wages paid at a rate of \$14 per hour.
- Injury reports have declined for the 4th year.
- The Zoological Society will be partnering with Jungle Jordan to create engaging online content related to the animals at PPZ. The content will be recorded in May.
- The fall photo contest was very popular and great for community engagement.
- Conservation bookmarks raised \$4,833 for the PPZ conservation fund in 2024.
- The PPZ AAZK chapter held several successful conservation fundraising events in 2024 and is holding a new event in 2025, Tats for Bats.
- Zoo Nights with Lights sold out in December.
- The bongo calf is doing well and Maeve the youngest female bongo was transferred to another AZA facility based on SSP recommendations.
- The red panda cub Wiley is exploring the outside exhibit.
- The two Arctic foxes have been introduced and are doing well.

NEW BUSINESS

Population Management Report

Director Wagner reported that participation in SSP programs for species housed at AZA zoos is now a requirement in the 2025 AZA standards. The Population Management Center (PMC) which is housed at Lincoln Park Zoo facilitates all research and breeding recommendations based on genetics. Every year the PMC will produce a report for each AZA facility that shows how they have participated or not participated. These reports will be given to AZA inspectors and taken into consideration during the accreditation process. The report included in the packet is an example of what the inspectors will be given. Fulfilled rates are not expected to be 100%, as you cannot guarantee animals will be successful breeding, but institutions must make every effort to meet the recommendations.

Ticket Distribution Year End Report

Director Wagner reported that the ticket distribution spreadsheet for 2024 shows that 1,394 tickets were distributed of which 117 have been redeemed so far. In 2023 1,115 were distributed and 339 were redeemed. Passes have an expiration of one year from the time they are issued.

Feline Primate Architectural and Engineering Services Discussion

Director Wagner stated they had received four bids for A&E Services for this project. One bid was eliminated as they did not include all services in the Not to Exceed (NTE) Cost. Another bid was eliminated as they changed how they submitted their cost, and the numbers were not accurate. The zoo team including the purchasing director interviewed the vendors of the two remaining bids and a final recommendation will be made to the building authority January 28. Director Wagner is still waiting to hear when the zoo will receive the funds from the state. That could delay the start of the project.

OLD BUSINESS

Animal Health Facility Progress

Brian Fisher reported that construction is on schedule with a planned completion date of July 2025. He stated the steel frame and roof were in the process of being installed and that the building was beginning to take shape. Kyle Binkley asked if the water line would change that date. Brian answered that the project is on schedule so far even with the water line replacement planned.

Cheryl Bergman asked what the donor recognition would look like and what levels would be recognized. Amy Morris-Hall stated the Society would be recognizing large donors how they had agreed upon when the donation was received and in addition would have a donor wall in the public viewing area to recognize every donor for this project. She described the wall and that there would be larger plaques for large donors and smaller mentions for donors of lesser amounts, but that every donor would be on the wall.

Fundraising Update

Executive Director Morris- Hall reported that Merritt Frey had started in the new fundraising position and is working on the three- and six-month plan. The goal is to continue to raise funds for the hospital. Merritt will attend a future board meeting to meet board members and discuss the plan.

Executive Director Morris-Hall reported the Society would be receiving a \$10,000 donation for the hospital and that they had been awarded a grant from the Michigan Arts and Culture Council for 18,000 for hospital equipment and 15,000 for Society operations.

BOARD COMMENTS

None

LIMITED PUBLIC COMMENT

None

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 6:49 p.m.

DRAFT

**POTTER PARK ZOO
BALANCE SHEET - PRELIMINARY
AS OF JANUARY 31st, 2025**

ASSETS

CASH	\$ 1,384,507
DEPOSITORY CASH	20,332
IMPREST CASH	8,000
TAXES REC - CURRENT LEVY	3,535,932
IFT TAX RECEIVABLE	(12,378)
TAXES REC - DELINQUENT	42,717
ESTIMATED UNCOLLECTIBLE DELINQUENT TAXES	(18,601)
ACCOUNTS REC-OTHER	80
PROPERTY TAX RECEIVABLE	-
INTEREST RECEIVABLE	2,760
DUE FROM STATE	-
DUE FROM OTHER FUNDS	-
INVENTORY	173,782
INVESTMENT YIELD ADJUSTMENT	1
PREPAID EXPENSES	-

TOTAL ASSETS

<u>\$ 5,137,131</u>

LIABILITIES

VOUCHERS PAYABLE	-
DUE TO ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY	(74,006)
TAX LEVY LIABILITY	19,100
SALES TAX PAYABLE	2,050
REFUND NOW	(61)
REFUND APPLY	(865)
ACCRUED PAYROLL	-
ACCOUNTS PAYABLE	21,622
DEFERRED REVENUE - DELINQUENT TAXES	26,628
DEFERRED REVENUE - PROPERTY TAXES	-
DEF REVENUE -POTTER PARK	16,122

TOTAL LIABILITIES

<u>10,590</u>

FUND BALANCE

UNSPENDABLE	173,782
UNRESTRICTED FUND BALANCE	4,952,759
	<u>5,126,541</u>

TOTAL LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCE

<u>\$ 5,137,131</u>

NOTE: This is based on figures posted to fiscal year 2024 as of the current date. The county audit has not yet been completed. The county audit will provide a final financial statement once the audit has been completed.

Prepared By: Eric J. Thelen

POTTER PARK ZOO
YEAR TO DATE BUDGET/ACTUAL REPORT - PRELIMINARY
FOR 12 MONTHS ENDING JANUARY 31, 2025

	JAN 2025 YTD				JAN 2024 YTD	% DIFF LAST
	2025 BUDGET	ACTUAL - PRELIMINARY	BUDGET REMAINING	% OF BUDGET		
REVENUES						
PROPERTY TAX	\$ 4,895,756	\$ 4,733,041	\$ 162,715	96.68%	\$ 4,183,490	13.14%
UNALLOCATED PORTION OF TAXES (10 MONTHS)	\$ -	\$ (4,338,621)	\$ -	0.00%	\$ (3,834,866)	0.00%
ADMISSIONS	\$ 735,000	\$ 2,476	\$ 732,525	0.34%	\$ 3,555	-30.36%
CONCESSIONS, GIFT SHOP, VENDING	\$ 806,000	\$ 1,998	\$ 804,002	0.25%	\$ 6,269	-68.12%
PARKING FEES	\$ 180,000	\$ 35	\$ 179,965	0.02%	\$ 115	-69.57%
INTERACTIVE SITES	\$ 95,000	\$ -	\$ 95,000	0.00%	\$ -	#DIV/0!
INTEREST INCOME	\$ 40,000	\$ 44	\$ 39,956	0.11%	\$ 3,244	-98.64%
OTHER REVENUES	\$ (443,928)	\$ 16,986	\$ (460,914)	-3.83%	\$ 1,826	830.40%
TOTAL REVENUES	\$ 6,307,828	\$ 415,959	\$ 1,553,248	6.59%	\$ 363,632	14.39%
EXPENDITURES						
PERSONNEL SERVICES						
Salaries & Wages - Full Time	\$ 2,134,176	\$ 129,758	\$ 2,004,418	6.08%	\$ 91,051	42.51%
Salaries & Wages - Seasonal	\$ 695,284	\$ 41,790	\$ 653,494	6.01%	\$ 20,144	107.46%
Benefits	\$ 1,284,760	\$ 86,171	\$ 1,198,589	6.71%	\$ 69,670	23.69%
Total Personnel Services	\$ 4,114,220	\$ 257,719	\$ 3,856,501	6.26%	\$ 180,864	42.49%
CONTROLLABLE EXPENDITURES						
Supplies	\$ 503,000	\$ 6,000	\$ 497,000	1.19%	\$ 7,757	-22.65%
Animal Care	\$ 317,000	\$ 6,241	\$ 310,759	1.97%	\$ 29,645	-78.95%
Purchased Services	\$ 680,000	\$ 31,180	\$ 648,820	4.59%	\$ 31,356	-0.56%
Utilities - Telephone	\$ 23,125	\$ -	\$ 23,125	0.00%	\$ -	#DIV/0!
Rentals & Leases	\$ 6,000	\$ -	\$ 6,000	0.00%	\$ -	#DIV/0!
Other Expenses	\$ 140,400	\$ 33,562	\$ 106,838	23.90%	\$ 35,494	-5.44%
Total Controllable Expenditures	\$ 1,669,525	\$ 76,984	\$ 1,592,541	4.61%	\$ 104,252	-26.16%
NON-CONTROLLABLE EXPENDITURES						
Utilities	\$ 240,000	\$ 20,676	\$ 219,324	8.61%	\$ -	#DIV/0!
Insurance	\$ 90,000	\$ 56,509	\$ 33,491	62.79%	\$ 53,410	5.80%
IT Support Expense	\$ 193,497	\$ -	\$ 193,497	0.00%	\$ 8,277	-100.00%
Other Expenses	\$ 586	\$ 147	\$ 439	25.01%	\$ 124	18.59%
Total Non-Controllable Expenditures	\$ 524,083	\$ 77,331	\$ 446,752	14.76%	\$ 61,811	25.11%
CAPITAL OUTLAY						
Capital Improvements	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	#DIV/0!	\$ -	#DIV/0!
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 6,307,828	\$ 412,034	\$ 5,895,794	6.53%	\$ 346,926	18.77%
TOTAL CHANGE IN FUND BALANCE	\$ -	\$ 3,925			\$ 16,705	
FUND BALANCE AS OF 1/1/25						
NON-SPENDABLE		\$ 173,782				
UNRESTRICTED		\$ 610,214				
		<u>\$ 783,995</u>				
FUND BALANCE AS OF 01/31/25		\$ 787,920				
FUND BALANCE AS OF 01/31/25						
UNSPENDABLE		\$ 173,782				
UNRESTRICTED		\$ 614,139				
		<u>\$ 787,920</u>				

NOTE: The Fund balance beginning balance is based on figures posted to fiscal year 2024 as of current date. The county audit has not been completed, and these figures may change. Financial Services will provide a final financial statement once the audit has been completed.

Prepared By: Eric J. Thelen

**POTTER PARK ZOO
MONTHLY ATTENDANCE REPORT
FOR MONTH AND YTD JANUARY 31, 2025**

ADMISSION TYPE	2024	2025 Gate	2025 Online	2025 Total	BETTER (WORSE) THAN PY	2024 COUNT	2025 COUNT	BETTER (WORSE) THAN PY
GENERAL								
CHILD RESIDENT	84	33	0	33	(51)	84	33	(51)
CHILD NON-RESIDENT	111	66	1	67	(44)	111	67	(44)
CHILDREN - UNDER 3	41	44	2	46	5	41	46	5
ADULT RESIDENT	298	225	5	230	(68)	298	230	(68)
ADULT NON-RESIDENT	273	205	18	223	(50)	273	223	(50)
SENIOR/MILITARY RESIDENT	7	8	0	8	1	7	8	1
SENIOR/MILITARY NON-RESIDENT GROUPS	8	5	0	5	(3)	8	5	(3)
	43	0	0	0	(43)	43	0	(43)
SUBTOTAL	865	586	26	612	(253)	865	612	(253)
MEMBERSHIPS/PROGRAMS								
PPZ MEMBERS/RECIPROCAL	401	318	0	318	(83)	401	318	(83)
SOCIETY PROGRAMMING/EVENTS	221	244	0	244	23	221	244	23
MONDAY PROGRAM	48	18	0	18	(30)	48	18	(30)
ZIYN	77	38	0	38	(39)	77	38	(39)
OTHER (non-paying)	45	3	0	3	(42)	45	3	(42)
SUBTOTAL	792	621	0	621	(171)	792	621	(171)
GRAND TOTAL	1,657	1,207	26	1,233	(424)	1,657	1,233	(424)

Wild Wanderers 0

ADMISSION TYPE	DESCRIPTION
CHILDREN RESIDENT	Children, Ingham County ages 3-16 (\$5 April - October, \$3 November-March)
CHILDREN NON-RESIDENT	Children, Out of Ingham County ages 3-16 (\$5 April - October, \$3 November-March)
CHILDREN - UNDER 3	All Children, any county under age 3 (Free)
ADULT RESIDENT	Adult of Ingham County (\$7 April 1 - Oct. 31, \$4 November-March)
ADULT NON-RESIDENT	Adult Out of Ingham County (\$13 April 1 - Oct. 31, \$4 November-March)
SENIOR/MILITARY RESIDENT	Seniors/Military of Ingham County (\$5 April 1 - Oct. 31, \$4 November-March)
SENIOR/MILITARY NON-RESIDENT	Seniors/Military of Ingham County (\$11 April 1 - Oct. 31, \$4 November-March)
PPZ MEMBERS	Visitors holding membership at PPZ - one time payment
SPECIAL EVENTS - PPZ	Admission included in event fee
SPECIAL EVENTS - COUNTY	Admission included in event fee
RECIPROCAL ZOO MEMBERS	Reciprocal Zoo memberships (Discount varies)
RECIPROCAL ZOO MEMBERS (100%)	Reciprocal Zoo Members (Free admission)
GROUPS	20 or more guests paying together (\$1 off per person)
MONDAY PROGRAM	Ingham County and City of Lansing Residents free 9-12 PM on non-holiday Mondays
OTHER (non-paying)	Any coupon related attendee

POTTER PARK



Director's Report February 12, 2025

Public Safety

The first session of firearms training will be on April 8 and 9. There will be two more trainings this year.

All full-time staff are scheduled to have their CPR/AED/First Aid training completed by February 11. The Red Cross certification is good for two years.

Membership

2024 Total Member Visits: 24,761

Adult: 13,901

Child: 8,686

Infant: 1,821

Senior: 328

2024 Average Active Members (not including children in households): 7,491

3,026 Households Purchased Memberships

Volunteer Program:

2024	# of Individuals	Hours
Adult Volunteers	110	6,551
Teen Volunteers (Zoo Teen Program)	42	1,889
Group Volunteers	644	1,437
One Time Volunteers	31	80
Interns (Animal Care)	6	3,240
Interns (Society)	14	3,373
Total	847	16,580

The first prospective volunteer information event went well. The first event held on January 30 had 23 attendees. There will be another event held on February 22.

Communications – Heath Thurman

Annual Report

- We are in the process of collecting information for the 2024 Annual Report.

Accessibility Initiatives

- We are enhancing accessibility by implementing alt text for images across our social media platforms and website. This effort aligns with our commitment to inclusivity and ensuring all audiences can engage with our content.

Upcoming Projects

- Education & Event Artwork – Design work for educational materials and event promotions will begin in this month.
- Animal Bracketology Returns! – March will bring back our popular animal bracket challenge. Pazi will try to defend his title as the community’s favorite animal—who will take the crown this year?

Jungle Jordan Collaboration

- Planning is underway for our collaboration with Jungle Jordan and the animal care team. A detailed game plan will be developed for our scheduled filming date on May 13, 2025.

Social Media Highlights

- Viral Moment: Ragnar, our Canadian lynx, became a Facebook sensation last month! A video of him knocking down a snowman reached nearly 250,000 views and engaged thousands of followers.

Conservation Engagement

There will be some changes to the Zoo Teen program activities in 2025 to provide for a safer experience for all.

As a thank you for being a Potter Park Zoo member, we are giving members registration access to Zookambi two weeks before it opens to the public February 17.

The zoo has you covered with the wildest weeks of programming available in Michigan! Each day of camp includes a variety of hands-on experiences, animal presentations, and adventures typical zoo visitors don’t have.

We have a great camp season planned for 2025! We will offer both morning and afternoon sessions each week of Zookambi for kids entering grades 1-7. We will offer both morning and afternoon extended care as well.



Homeschool Zoo Crew is back for another semester with 41 students enrolled! Our 5-8-year-olds are exploring Human Impacts and Biogeology and the 9-14-year-olds are learning how to be Jr. Researchers.

BIG Zoo Lesson:

September 24 through January 2025 - Completed

- 12 weeks
- 511 students
- Districts 6
- Counties 3
- Grants 2 schools 4 classes (Potterville and Riley Elementary, St. Johns)

Remaining weeks

- Feb – April 2025
- 9 weeks
- 17 classes
- 375 Estimated students
- 5 Districts
- 1 County (Ingham)

DEAI

FALCONERS

January kicked off our tenth year for the FALCONERS program. The program had its first event of the year Saturday, January 25. There were 22 people in attendance. Although the weather was cold, the families who made it out enjoyed their time in the zoo! Our next event is Saturday, February 22 9 am - 12 pm.

Zoo in Your Neighborhood

A frigid cold month brought low numbers for our ZIYN pass guests. We welcomed 38 total guests in January.

Overview of 2024:

- Total Passes: 1,644
- Total Guests: 5,785
- Avg of 3.5 people per pass

The CE&I Internship is now a paid part-time internship. Paid internships are important because they provide students with valuable work experience while also helping them support themselves financially, making opportunities more accessible to a wider range of individuals.

Mariah Martinez renewed her Autism Certificate for another two years through International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Services (IBCCES). This certificate recognizes professionals who have completed autism-specific training and certification to better understand and improve outcomes when working with individuals on the autism spectrum. The Student Mental Health Course recognizes professionals who have completed mental health training and certification to better understand and identify students who may have mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression.

Mariah Martinez was interviewed by Evan Winters and FALCONERS is featured in the January issue of Able Connection.

Work is continuing to on a new Accessibility Action Plan that evolved from the zoo completing the Arts and Culture Accessibility Self-Assessment through Open Door Arts. From this assessment we have already implemented staff learning about Medical ID Tags to better assist guests who are having a medical emergency. A medical identification tag gives responders or those assisting with an emergency important information in case the person needing help is unresponsive. The tags may offer a valuable clue as to the cause of the person's sudden illness.

There will be more accomplishments from our plan as the year continues.

Animal Care

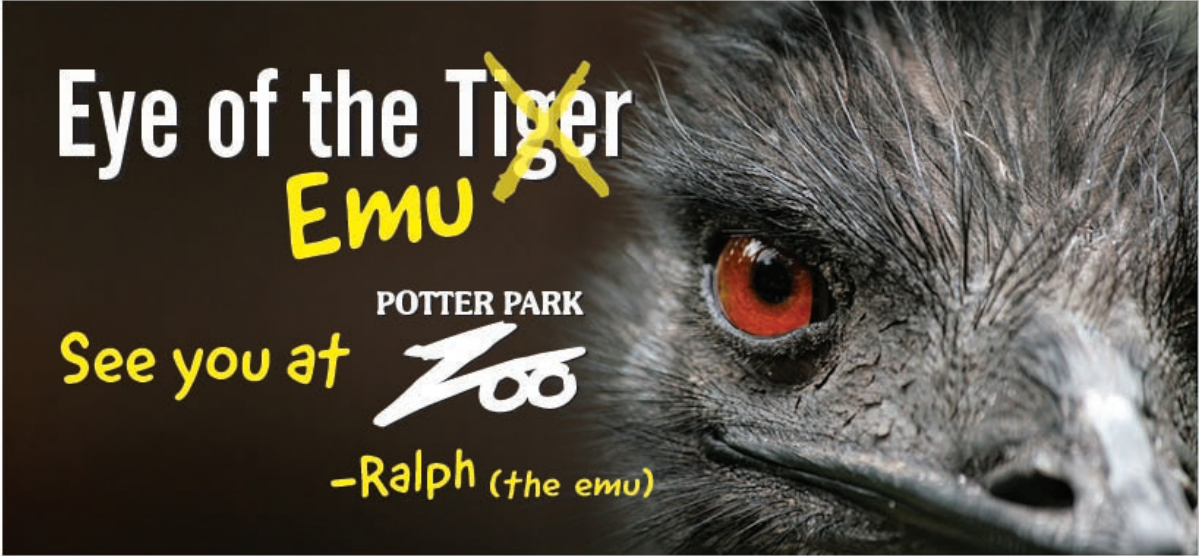


Exciting news—our northern tree shrews are growing fast! Since their initial weigh-in, they've more than tripled in weight. They're starting to open their eyes, but are still staying cozy in their nest box. We will do a media announcement once they are visible to the public.

The bongo calf is doing well and after the social media naming contest, is named Ahadi. Uzuri, bongo, is likely pregnant with another due in a few months. Both of these bongo births were breeding recommendations made by the Eastern bongo SSP.

Dezi, tufted deer, has moved to the emu exhibit and the emu will be in the old wolf/tufted deer yard once renovations are completed.

Zookeeper Nick Tap's last day is February 14. Interviews have started to fill this position.



Eye of the Tiger
~~EMU~~

See you at POTTER PARK
ZOO

-Ralph (the emu)



United States
Department of
Agriculture

January 13, 2025

Marketing and
Regulatory
Programs

Washington, DC
20250

The Honorable Andrew R. Garbarino
U.S. House of Representatives
2344 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Garbarino:

Thank you for your letter of October 1, 2024, co-signed by your colleagues, concerning the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act (AWA).

We at USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) share your concern for the welfare of animals, and appreciate your support of accredited zoos and aquariums with whom we share a common goal: animal health and welfare. To that end, we strive to achieve the best possible outcomes for all animals regulated under the AWA.

To a zoo or aquarium that has otherwise met or exceeded AWA standards of care, a citation for an animal injury may seem excessive. However, our Agency's statutory authority makes us responsible to the facilities we regulate, the animals we are charged to safeguard, and to the U.S. taxpayers who fund our activities. Our responsibility is to ensure that all AWA-protected animals are treated in accordance with the law.

For our Animal Care (AC) program, the critical issue remains ensuring the humane treatment of vulnerable animals. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to your questions:

1. How is APHIS prioritizing its inspection workload, especially in light of a limited inspector workforce, and difficulties in retention and recruitment? How is risk management used in determining priorities? Does APHIS prioritize inspection of facilities with a documented history of serious, repeat noncompliance, and if so, how, and what enforcement actions have been taken? How are facilities with good, longstanding records of compliance recognized and incentivized?

Our Agency's goal is to bring facilities into compliance, using inspector communication, outreach and education (such as Tech Notes and other publications), or enforcement. With regard to the size of the inspector workforce, to the extent available resources allow, we are implementing retention and recruitment strategies to build on current staffing.

We manage our AC inspection workload with a risk-based system that allows for more frequent inspections at facilities that have demonstrated noncompliance, with fewer inspections at those that have demonstrated consistent compliance. When determining inspection schedules AC inspectors also consider travel logistics; facility size and complexity; and the potential need for a team inspection, field specialist, or security.

In situations where enforcement may be necessary, the Agency first issues an "Official Warning, Violation of Federal Regulations" (APHIS Form 7060). Additional enforcement actions include administrative action (license suspension, license revocation, or civil penalties) and referral to the Department of Justice.

Facilities accredited with the Association of Zoos and Aquariums that have good, longstanding records of compliance are inspected with the lowest inspection frequency.

2. What specific policies does APHIS have in place for animal injuries that do not involve human errors or interactions, including instances when an animal is injured due to natural negative interactions that occurred because of socializing practices? How does APHIS appropriately balance physical safety and welfare while also ensuring animal social needs are met, even if that carries an element of risk?

APHIS recognizes that balancing physical safety, animal welfare, and social needs may result in an element of risk. However, we also expect facilities to minimize risks based on thorough planning and vigilance.

If an animal is injured due to natural negative interactions resulting from socialization practices, we may issue a citation depending on the specific circumstances. For instance, if prior documentation shows that specific animals are socially incompatible and have a history of negative interactions, but are still in contact, we are likely to issue a citation.

To ensure that we can enhance our support of regulated facilities, we are currently assessing our guidance for AC inspectors on citations for animal deaths. We understand that even facilities with long histories of compliance can face challenges, and we want the best possible outcomes for the animals and the facility. When an animal injury leads to death, we conduct an inspection, talk to the regulated facility, and review the facility's records. Sometimes, a death is a natural occurrence or unpreventable. However, if there are reasonable precautions a facility could have taken to prevent an animal death, we will issue a citation and work to educate the facility on corrective action.

3. What training, mentoring, and professional development are required by APHIS to ensure consistency in inspection outcomes and inspector interpretation of the AWA? How does APHIS ensure consistency in its appeals decisions?

We recognize that there are opportunities to improve inspection consistency. To that end, we have recently increased the duration of new inspector training from one month to six months. We have also improved training materials and increased job-shadowing opportunities before new inspectors conduct independent inspections. To maintain consistency between inspectors and facilities, AC officials collaborate with their supervisors to resolve questions. We also have inspectors work in teams when engaging with challenging species or facilities.

Our appeals decisions undergo independent appeals panel review to ensure consistency and fairness. Staff on the appeals panels cannot be involved in the appealed inspection nor be located in the inspector's chain of command. To further improve consistency of appeals, APHIS is conducting an internal review of the appeals process.

4. How does APHIS communicate policy changes to its inspector workforce? How does APHIS communicate policy changes to its licensees? Do you see potential benefit in exploring educational partnerships with the community of regulated facilities?

We communicate policy changes to AC inspectors through formal notices, a weekly newsletter, Inspection Guide updates, and Tech Notes. We communicate major policy changes to licensees through stakeholder announcements that are available via email subscription and on our website: [Stakeholder Announcements | Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service \(usda.gov\)](#).

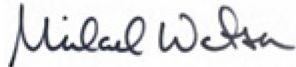
Our Agency has formed educational partnerships with regulated facilities and associated groups, including participation in APHIS-sponsored educational symposia. We also speak at several conferences, including those for the Zoological Association of America and the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, to provide updates about regulated facilities. We continue to seek additional opportunities for partnership with our licensees.

The Honorable Andrew R. Garbarino

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If you or your staff have additional questions or concerns, please contact Christopher Needham, our Agency's Legislative Director, at (202) 799-7027 or at Christopher.M.Needham@usda.gov. We are sending a similar response to your colleagues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Watson". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Michael Watson
Administrator
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

AZA DEI Update

Hello everyone. I'm sending this message as a colleague and friend, as AZA President and CEO, and with consent from the AZA Board of Directors.

The past few weeks have been full of fast-paced change, which for many has been challenging, difficult, or disappointing.

Many are experiencing real and immediate personal, professional and emotional effects, and especially those who have worked to support the values reflected in the AZA Strategic Plan – through words like diversity, equity, access, and inclusion. Your work has made us and our community better, and it and you are appreciated. Our next steps must be full of concern and empathy for colleagues, informed by clarity of thought and fulsome conversation, and fueled by determination for mission.

Dr. Lonnie Bunch, Smithsonian Secretary, and leader in envisioning and building the National Museum of African American History and Culture, said this in announcing the closure of the Smithsonian Institution's Office of Diversity –

We will continue to use every tool at our disposal to find and nurture excellence in our workforce. We will continue to expect and demand that our workplace is free from discrimination and harassment, and we will adhere to our long-held principles of fairness and equality. We have long told the stories and embraced the experiences of all Americans, and we will keep doing so in line with our mission.

Dr. Bunch's words call us back to mission. Moving forward, in addition to caring for one another, we intend to focus on mission – how we can best position ourselves to continue and support our work. Not where we are, today, but where we want to be, tomorrow. Better in caring for staff and animals. Better in providing engaging experiences for guests. Better in conserving wildlife and wild places. More understanding, empathetic, and compassionate. Presenting all people with a greater equality of opportunity, and an expanded sense of belonging.

In the coming months, we will be exploring and working to accomplish these things. Please join us at Mid-Year Meeting in Palm Desert, California, and at Annual Conference, in Tampa, Florida, and in dozens of conversations that will occur before, between, and after these meetings. **All are welcome, and we will be honored by your presence and enriched by your contributions.**

Together, we are AZA, and it is in our nature to celebrate life in all its beauty and diversity. That is unchanging.

And in the meantime, we are carefully considering the evolving social and operating environment and positioning our community for continued progress without needlessly exposing fellow accredited facilities and members to political hostility and financial impacts. Immediately, we are taking these steps:



