



## Wildlife Learning Center

April 17, 2017

Los Angeles City Council

Dear Committee on Personnel and Animal Welfare:

OPPOSITION to agenda item #16-1357. Please enter this letter into the public record to be included in any hearings, studies, and reports pertaining to this issue.

My name is David Riherd and I am the Director of Wildlife Learning Center (WLC). WLC has a twofold purpose: To provide public education in the life sciences and to provide a sanctuary for rescued animals.

The Wildlife Learning Center staff is a team of 16 biologists with a passion for wildlife and environmental education. Each staff member has a minimum of a bachelor's degree in biology, zoology, or animal science from some of the top universities in the country. Most accredited zoos are not entirely staffed by biologists, as is WLC.

WLC provides valuable life science education to children. We have given over 25,000 education programs in the Los Angeles Unified School District and in surrounding school districts. We have reached hundreds of thousands of children. Our classes focus on ecosystems and habitats, adaptations, and wildlife conservation. Studies conclusively show that live animals provide experiential learning that improves student comprehension and retention. In their journal article "Using Experiential Learning in Wildlife Courses to Improve Retention, Problem Solving, and Decision-Making," Kelly F. Millenbah and Joshua J. Millspaugh say that "experiential learning broadens, extends, and deepens the intellectual content of instruction by integrating theory and practice, increasing student motivation through the experience of applying knowledge."

WLC also offers adult education classes in the natural sciences. Annually, WLC draws over 35,000 onsite visitors. We give lessons on ecosystems and habitats, adaptations, wildlife conservation, feeding behaviors, and several more. After experiencing one of our classes, people undoubtedly gain a greater appreciation for wildlife and for conservation of our natural environment.

As a wildlife sanctuary, Wildlife Learning Center is dedicated to providing life-long care to animals in need. More than 40 different species of displaced, rescued, and zoo-born wild

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animals call this shady, natural environment home. Some animals were confiscated from people who kept them as illegal pets; some owners relinquish a pet because they no longer can or want to care for their animal; and some are rehabilitated and non-releasable animals, meaning they cannot survive in the wild. For example, our bald eagles, red-tailed hawks, gray fox, squirrels, and opossums are unable to return to the wild due to permanent injuries. Occasionally, we will acquire an animal from a zoo or wildlife facility that does not have the space and is seeking to transfer that animal to a beneficial situation. For these animals, Wildlife Learning Center becomes their permanent home where they receive life-long care.

Wildlife Learning Center employs a highly regarded veterinarian who has the distinction of being a Diplomate in the American College of Zoological Medicine. She is one of only three veterinarians in Los Angeles County who is Board Certified in Zoo medicine and she makes herself available to Wildlife Learning Center seven days a week, 24 hours a day. We are free to contact her at any time with any questions or concerns about an animal in our care.

Wildlife Learning Center partners with several organizations to give employment opportunities and to bring life science education to their organizations. Every spring, WLC provides life science education for audiences at Disney's latest nature movie at El Capitan Theater, Hollywood. Before the showing of each nature movie, WLC educates viewers with an informative presentation as a special event for moviegoers. WLC has worked closely with the Los Angeles Zoo by caring for some of their surplus animals and exchanging husbandry information. WLC has an ongoing relationship with Tierra Del Sol to offer community employment services for developmentally disabled adults. Participants gain real workplace experience to prepare them for future job opportunities. WLC partners with the Moorpark Community College's Exotic Animal and Training and Management (EATM) Program to give hands-on work experience to students. Additionally, WLC Executive Director, David Riherd, is on the EATM Advisory Board. WLC fulfills biology student class projects for local colleges and universities including UCLA, California State University, Northridge, Loyola Marymount University, College of the Canyons, and Pierce College.

Wildlife Learning Center holds permits from, is inspected by, and is in compliance with the following agencies:

- City of Los Angeles Animal Services
- State of California Fish and Wildlife
- USDA Animal Welfare
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Permit for Migratory Birds
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Permit for Eagles

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Wildlife Learning Center has never been in violation of any city, California, or federal regulations, and in our 20-year existence we have never experienced a breach of safety.

We are concerned that this ban will negatively impact WLC's valuable wildlife rescue and our conservation and environmental education programs. We are a legitimate conservation organization that is grounded in public education of conservation and the life sciences. Our education program, not for entertainment or amusement, impacts people because of their profound interest and curiosity in learning about wildlife and the conservation of our natural resources.

Wildlife Learning Center wants to assure the Los Angeles City Council that we do not utilize the animals under our care for amusement or entertainment. We cherish these animals and we believe that our sanctuary and education programs clearly demonstrate our dedication to animal welfare and their role in helping to educate the public on the plight of wildlife worldwide.

Sincerely,

David J. Riherd  
Executive Director  
Wildlife Learning Center

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