

MOTION

Billy, the Asian bull elephant who has lived for decades at the Los Angeles Zoo and Botanical Gardens (Zoo), has spent much of his time in Los Angeles in conditions that only met minimums set by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). For many years before the opening of the current Elephants of Asia exhibit he was placed alone in a small enclosure where he was kept on hard surfaces not considered beneficial for his feet and joints, and allegedly received a lack of sufficient exercise and stimulation.

Billy long has been exhibiting abnormal (stereotypic) behavioral patterns many elephant experts characterize as indicating detrimental mental health impacts from that environment. Elephants of Asia provides a better environment for him and the Zoo's other elephants but one which cannot compare with that afforded by a sanctuary in terms of space and natural conditions.

In the new exhibit Billy and the other elephants have had more space but still experience a lack of soft surfaces, and Billy's very presence along with the cows (females) Tina, Jewel, and Shaunzi, have until recently necessitated that the acreage be divided into large corrals so that Billy can be kept separate, as has been the standard for elephant bulls and cows in captivity. This expanded space has been broken up by being fenced off into areas (called "corrals") separated by electrified fences.

Thus, the purpose of the larger exhibit has been compromised, diluting the benefits of the costly expansion of the usable space for the Zoo's elephants completed a decade ago. Now the Zoo has decided to allow Billy and the females to occupy the same space at times, an inherently controversial and risky move according to elephant experts. The Zoo Vision Plan's new proposal to further expand the usable acreage of the exhibit by about three acres does not ultimately resolve all of these issues and creates new ones by intruding into wildlife habitats outside of the zoo's current boundaries.

Additionally, for several years the Zoo attempted unsuccessfully to collect genetic material from Billy for use in assisted captive breeding efforts in North America. Techniques for collecting this material are necessarily extremely invasive, adding to the list of ways Billy's long stay at the Zoo has been detrimental to his well-being. According to the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, "Elephants in zoos breed poorly or not at all."

Noting that, for assisted reproduction, timing is crucial, the Institute's website continues, "...Unfortunately, techniques for freezing an elephant's (reproductive material) and then thawing it at the opportune moment have not been perfected." This suggests that Billy could continue to be subjected to invasive treatment in the future with the scant prospect of effectuating successful breeding. In the unlikely occurrence of an elephant being born it would just increase the size of the Zoo's herd and, unlike the Zoo's highly-praised condor program, would not increase the prospect of species survival in the long run.

It is past the time the physical discomfort and potential threats to his health Billy has faced for much of his life should have come to an end. More than a decade ago the Zoo sent Ruby, an African cow who would not have been compatible with the Asian elephant concept of the current



exhibit, to a sanctuary in Northern California. This earned the Zoo plaudits and allowed Ruby to live out the rest of her life in the most positive environment then available to her in North America.

Subsequent litigation (Leider v. Lewis) found that the Zoo still needed to improve its care and treatment of elephants. The court found in favor of the plaintiff but it remains disputed as to whether the Zoo has consistently complied with all of the instructions of the court for improved treatment of the elephants. Specifically, the Zoo allegedly is not providing the elephants with a soft surface in the exhibit as ordered by the Superior Court a number of years ago, adding to concerns about the elephants' physical health. Relocating Billy to a sanctuary is the optimal solution for him and also would provide Tina, Jewel, and Shaunzi more space on a daily basis.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the City Council instruct the Los Angeles Zoo to immediately cancel any current or future elephant breeding activities or programs involving any current or future elephants, and, in conjunction with the Chief Legislative Analyst, to report back within 30 days on the steps necessary to begin the process of safely relocating Billy to a suitable sanctuary environment; and

I FURTHER MOVE that the Zoo be instructed to immediately comply with all provisions of the Leider v. Lewis decision irrespective of the legal status of the case, and manage the Elephants of Asia exhibit as a more open environment for no more than four female elephants at a time, making more extensive real-time use of the available acreage for cows that have suffered abuse in previous living situations; and

I FURTHER MOVE that the Mayor and Council create an animal welfare oversight committee, comprised of bonafide experts in animal welfare and animal health, to advise the Mayor, the City Council, the Zoo and the Board of Zoo Commissioners on issues relating to the safe and healthful care and housing of elephants and all other animals at the Zoo.

PRESENTED BY:



PAUL KORETZ
Councilmember, 5th District

SECONDED BY:



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