

Legislation to transition the San Francisco Zoo into a new San Francisco Wildlife Center

The San Francisco Green Party proposes the following outline as a guide with which to prepare a City ordinance to completely recommission the existing San Francisco Zoo such that it becomes a 21st century Regional Wildlife Rescue and Habitat Center.

Three Primary Purposes:

1. End San Francisco Zoological Society management as soon as possible; the City will hire a new management team, ideally as City employees, but under contract if deemed necessary. The Zoological Society's control and management of the facility and its financing will be terminated as quickly as possible, and the current staff and volunteers will be gradually retrained and/or transitioned out. The City will take full, independent financial responsibility for the facility so that it will not be subject to future extortive financial leverage and whims of any management. Even if the current Zoological Society contract cannot be terminated for five years, the new contract period will be expressly undertaken for the purposes of transitioning the facility over that five years such that at the end of that contract period the Zoological Society is no longer involved in any way in the management or funding of the facility. The contract will be established as a "Transition Contract" designed to end the Zoological Society's role.
2. Exotic animals (not from our own Northwest bioregion) will be gradually phased out. As these animals die, the City will not replace them. The City will also transfer larger exotic animals to better sanctuaries as soon as possible. The facility will immediately stabilize and maintain, in the healthiest possible conditions, all current exotic animal residents which can be properly housed - for their lifetimes. The facility will maintain some capacity for future acceptance of mistreated, neglected, rescued exotic animals (from private keepers, circuses etc.) which need a temporary or even permanent home. Permanent housing of exotic animals at the facility will be minimized to the greatest extent possible. However, any engagement of the Wildlife Center in a perpetual 'musical chairs' rotation of exotic animals from one facility to another must be expressly avoided.
3. Over the next decade, gradually transition the facility from a "zoo" into a Regional Wildlife Rescue, Habitat Restoration, and Ecological Education Center.

Creation Of Special Committee

The legislation creating the Center will first establish a Board of Supervisors Special Wildlife Center Committee which will implement the Wildlife Center Transition Ordinance. This Special Committee, among other tasks, will prepare to establish by charter amendment, a new Wildlife Center Commission (to completely replace all Zoo and Rec & Park Commission oversight). The new Wildlife Center Commission will include a majority of wildlife, habitat, habitat restoration, and wildlife rescue experts in its membership (and will also include one exotic animal rescue and sanctuary expert). The Board of Supervisors will be given strong powers in establishing the Wildlife Center Commission membership, in order to avoid a private special interest influenced commission that might otherwise be created by the Mayor's office.

Special Committee First Tasks

The first task of the Special Wildlife Center Committee will be to establish the Transition Contract to phase out the San Francisco Zoological Society's involvement in the facility and transfer all tasks as quickly and safely as possible to a new management team. This management transition will take no longer than five years. Fundraising responsibilities will *not* be transferred to the new management team and will instead be transferred to City staff, and be taken up by the new Wildlife Center Commission staff, once that staff is in place. If the Commission contracts out the fundraising function, it -must- still be kept completely separate from Center management.

The critical primary purpose of the Transition Contract will be to first immediately improve and stabilize current conditions under which animals are now living at the facility. A team of independent experts will be brought in to assess the current conditions at the facility and then, with legislated authority, will direct the Zoological Society staff on a process of immediate work to alter those conditions until all animals housed at the facility are comfortable and able to thrive.

This independent team will also direct an immediate process of transitioning all animals which *cannot* live comfortably and thrive at the facility, as quickly as possible, to safer and better conditions elsewhere. During the transition, any animal that must be caged or kept in unhealthy restrictions for public safety, will be moved as quickly as possible to a better sanctuary facility.

The New Wildlife Center

During the management transition, and afterward, the current facility will evolve into a fully and professionally staffed Regional Wildlife Rescue, Habitat Restoration, and Ecological Education Center named 'The San Francisco Wildlife Center' with the following basic characteristics.

Northwest Wildlife

The Center will provide carefully guided *and non wildlife intrusive* educational visits for students and the public to see restored Northwest regional natural habitat, and rescued Northwest regional animals (like the newly arrived grizzly bears) which cannot return to their original habitats and must remain at the facility (in habitats as close to those they originally inhabited as possible).

Example: If we had already had a Northwest wildlife center in place, the coyotes which were shot for chasing and biting pets, could instead have been easily transferred to the wildlife center.

The Wildlife Center will be more extensive than a solely land oriented facility and will include restored wetlands, creeks, ponds, lakes, and coastal marine ecosystems.

During the guided visits, visitors will be educated about human/animal and human/ecosystem conflicts and crises, and habitat restoration challenges.

Note: Because gratuitous hand feeding and excessive petting is unnatural and harmful to animals and wildlife, there will be no animal feeding or petting areas at the Center.

The New Wildlife Center (continued)

Active Habitat Restoration

The Center will be responsible for developing and implementing an active regional habitat restoration and sustainability plan for the San Francisco Bay Area.

Among other tasks, Center staff will prepare a comprehensive inventory of San Francisco's existing regional habitat situation, to include existing wild open spaces, as well as cityscapes, city lakes, city creeks, coastal waters, wetlands and migratory bird habitats, and all islands.

Once this regional habitat assessment has been comprehensively established, a team from the center will coordinate an ongoing permanent regional habitat restoration project, to return the San Francisco Bay Area and the City of San Francisco itself, to as natural and wild conditions as are possible in relation to human activity. The team will use watershed based management and permaculture techniques as a guide for its work. (For a description of Permaculture see: http://www.idepfoundation.org/idep_permaculture.html)

The Center's open spaces themselves will to the greatest extent possible become full habitat for regional plants and wildlife. To the greatest extent possible, these open spaces will be left unfenced and integrated into the broader coastal and Bay Area bioregion.

The Center will help develop regional wildlife corridors which enable animals to safely migrate from one part of the region to another, promoting diverse gene pools, and increasing animal and habitat vibrance.

Local indigenous peoples' groups will be consulted and included in habitat restoration plans; plans which, where ecologically sensible, will also include restoration of cultural practices and historical cultural centers of those groups. (Such groups will also participate in the design and presentation of the virtual pre-history exhibits described further below.)

Wise Introduced Species Management

The Center will also coordinate regional responses to animals, insects and plants seen as invaders and 'pests' by governments, businesses, agriculture, and the public. This coordination will provide strong alternatives to spray and other pesticides that would poison animals and plants such as the African frogs in Golden Gate Park. A primary purpose of this function will be to also provide realistic assessments and alternatives to avoid aerial spraying and other dangers to the public.

In this role, Center staff will recognize that seeking to establish pristine 'original' habitat from a given historical Bay Area time period is ideological, rather than realistic or practical. New species have introduced themselves, or have been introduced, regularly, to regional habitats for millions of years, and such introduction is therefore perfectly natural. Strong preference will be given to benign adaptive management of newer species in the region, (management such as the introduction or re-introduction of natural predators) rather than radical attempts to completely remove and/or exterminate relative newcomer species.

The New Wildlife Center (continued)

Human/Wildlife Emergency Conflict Response

The Center will house a well-trained emergency response team, to handle as benignly and humanely as possible, human/pet/wildlife conflicts in San Francisco; and to immediately and effectively respond to any facility animal escapes (bears, tigers etc).

Regional Wildlife Emergency Disaster Response

The Center will house a regional habitat disaster response team and emergency wildlife rescue facility, which will be the lead regional coordinating center for responding to the regional habitat and wildlife impacts of crises such as oil spills, tsunamis and earthquakes. This disaster response center will coordinate with, but never depend on, the Coast Guard. This center will coordinate all ad hoc volunteer disaster response teams.

Exotic Animal Rescue

Though its primary purposes should strictly be dedicated to regional wildlife and habitat, it must be recognized that the current facility extensively houses exotic animals, and so for some time must remain a home and rescue center for exotic animals (though less so over time) as the Center evolves. While *absolutely no* new wild, or facility bred, exotic animals will be accepted at the Wildlife Center, existing exotic animal residents which can continue to be housed in a healthy and vibrant condition in the facility, will remain and be cared for through their natural lifetimes. Their habitats will approximate to the best extent possible, their original natural home habitats. For the foreseeable future, the Center will also serve as a transition station for exotic animals rescued from poor living conditions, which have no existing better sanctuary to which they can be immediately sent.

The Center will house a team of trained exotic animal rescue professionals who will assess and implement the best possible course of action for each exotic animal remaining at the facility, and for each future exotic animal rescue situation that arises. This team will strive to permanently transfer such exotic animals as soon as possible, either to their original habitats, or to better established sanctuaries specifically designed to care for those animals. The Center will only keep and care for exotic animals when no other reasonable permanent transition option is available. Once committing to permanently keep and care for a rescued exotic animal, the Center will care for that animal for the rest of its lifetime, unless and until a clearly better sanctuary or habitat option becomes available for that animal. But, at no time will the Center participate in the perpetual musical chairs style rotating of exotic animals from facility to facility, which currently operates between existing zoos and other facilities. The Center will not breed exotic animals.

Where ecologically sensible, the Center will also create special open habitats, to provide better home territory for formerly exotic but now wild/feral bird species like the Telegraph Hill parrots.

Finally, because of the unnatural, health sensitive, and tenuous living conditions of existing and rescued exotic animal residents housed at the Center, the public viewing of exotic animals will be phased out as quickly as possible in favor of the virtual and museum centers described below.

The New Wildlife Center (continued)

Ecological Education And Wildlife Sciences School

The Center will house an ecological education and wildlife sciences school in which volunteers employees and students will be able to earn course credits and degrees, and gain vocational training through apprenticing in the broader Center responsibilities noted above.

The Center will expand this educational role by actively engaging with other local schools and colleges, providing classes, assistance to classes, and other community educational services.

Replacing Captive Animal Viewing With Full Surround Wildlife Film Theaters

In preparation for the phasing out of captive animal viewing in the Center, Wildlife Commission staff will invite companies like Lucasfilms, and Industrial Light and Magic, as a gift to the City, to build a set of virtual reality, full surround film theaters, to show animals in their various global natural habitats. The City will share in securing funding for this nonprofit theater facility.

Visitors will view from within the centers of immersion theaters (and also by wearing headsets at personal viewing kiosks) full 3D surround wildlife films of:

- Exotic animals in their natural habitats
- Regional animals in their natural habitats
- Marine animals in their natural water habitats
- 3D theatrical artists renderings of prehistoric animals in their natural prehistoric habitats

The prehistoric surround film exhibits will be comprised of different sections for different time periods and global locations, and with a specific group of these sections specific to showing San Francisco Bay Area regional wildlife and habitat in various historical time periods.

Natural History Museum

San Francisco does not have its own natural history museum and badly needs one. The Wildlife Center will also house a natural history museum, which among exhibits and artifacts of various global prehistoric time periods, will also specialize in exhibits and artifacts of local wildlife throughout geological time.

Overseas Eco-educational Excursions For Young People And Students

The Center will establish a program to fund and guide overseas eco-educational trips to enable young people and San Francisco area college students to directly witness wildlife in actual indigenous habitats.

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