

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS
FROM: BRUCE T. MOORE, CITY MANAGER
SUBJECT: IN DEFENSE OF ANIMALS (IDA) LETTER
DATE: MAY 13, 2011

In the past several days, each of you have received a letter from In Defense of Animals (IDA), an animal rights group from California. This group has taken the opportunity of Mary the elephant's death to suggest that the Little Rock Zoo should end its elephant program and move Ellen, the remaining elephant, to an elephant sanctuary. The Little Rock Zoo has been Ellen's home since 1954 and staff stands firmly committed to the position that the Zoo is the best place for Ellen and that it should continue to be her home. The Zoo stands firmly committed to doing what is best for Ellen and providing exceptional care for all of our elephants and it will continue to do so in the future.

The Little Rock Zoo is moving forward to acquire an additional elephant to be a companion to Ellen. Zoo Staff remains committed to providing Ellen the best possible care and will continue to focus on her health and well-being. The Zoo recently expanded its elephant exhibit and exceeds both USDA and Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) standards for elephants and provides a healthy environment filled with enrichment.

The notion that Ellen would be better-off at an elephant sanctuary is not necessarily correct. Moving Ellen across the country to a private elephant ranch could cause her great harm. Non-accredited zoos and private elephant ranches are not always an appropriate alternative for elephant care. These are places where elephants live with assistance from people who provide food, water and shelter but are not required to meet the rigorous AZA Standards for Elephant Management and Care. It is a common misconception that private elephant ranches provide freedom; however, while they can provide larger acreage, this alone does not translate to better health and welfare. The AZA-accredited zoos that care for elephants differ from the private elephant ranches in several important ways:

- AZA-accredited zoos are open to the public and are committed to helping people learn about elephants, the conservation issues threatening them, and the ways in which people can take action to protect them.

There is a need for an elephant program at the Little Rock Zoo and staff will continue to manage the elephant, or elephants, in our care to the highest possible standard. An important need within the Elephant Species Survival Plan is for appropriate, professionally-managed facilities to house older, non-reproductive females. The Little Rock Zoo serves this need by focusing our efforts not on breeding but on the management of older elephants. Our elephant program treats medical issues unique to aging elephants and has served as a leader in the development of exercise and nutrition programs for older elephants.

If additional information is needed, please advise.