

# APPENDIX A

Notifications to Zoo Management,  
Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA)  
and USDA Animal Plant Health Inspection  
Service (APHIS)

This email was sent to the Zoo Superintendent and the Parks and Recreation Director, Sunday night June 9, 2024.

“Earlier today, the Area 4 keeper and I decided to team up to clean the lion exhibit. My task was to clean up any droppings, left over bones, debris etc. The keeper was to inspect the integrity of the enclosure, the functioning of the hot wire and refresh the water container.

At around 10 am while I was cleaning the lion exhibit, I looked up to see Kimani, the lioness, two feet away!!!!

Somehow she had gotten into the exhibit. It took everything I had to back away and hold her off with the shovel. I slowly made my way along the east wall of the exhibit and up the north side to the gate. She followed closely the whole way, being very curious but thankfully not overly aggressive. Getting the door open while holding the shovel to keep her from escaping was very difficult. Miraculously I made it out, unharmed but definitely in shock!

While this happened the keeper was inside the building filling the water bucket.

I didn't stick around to find out just how this happened. I was still in shock. The keeper was very apologetic.

I share this story not to get anyone in trouble but to point out the short comings of a safety system dependent upon administrative controls. There should be an interlock that would prevent the personal doors entering the exhibit from being open when either of the two lion doors to the exhibit are not closed and locked. This same philosophy and rigor needs to be applied to the two snow leopard doors, the two sloth bear doors and the tiger door.

I truly hope the zoo will learn from this accident and take the opportunity to reexamine and upgrade the safety barriers to all of the carnivore exhibits. There are so many ways this could have turned out tragically.”

This email was sent to the AZA on July 2, 2024

To: AZA

My name is Bob Nitschke, a longtime volunteer at the Idaho Falls Zoo. I would like to report a near fatal incident on Sunday June 9th at approximately 10 am. I was cleaning the lion exhibit when I looked up to see Kimani, the lioness, two feet away!!!!

Somehow she had gotten into the exhibit. It took everything I had to back away and hold her off with the shovel. I backed down the hill to the bottom of the exhibit and slowly made my way along the east wall of the exhibit and up the north side to the gate. She followed closely the whole way, being very curious but thankfully not overly aggressive. I keep saying: "No Kimani, No Kimani"... Getting the door open while holding the shovel to keep her from escaping was very difficult. Miraculously I made it out, unharmed but definitely in shock!

I didn't stick around to find out just how this happened. I was still in shock. The keeper was very apologetic.

I took a photo after this event and it is attached. The incident started on the left side of the photo near the pile of rocks. The lion entrance to the exhibit is a tunnel in the hillside behind the lion structure (~ between the two platforms). The personnel entrance to the zoo is outside of the view of the photo. It would be on the right about the same elevation as the bottom platform. Kimani is in the wood pile.

I am happy to provide additional information that you might need or want. My main interest is that there is an independent investigation to determine what happened and that steps are taken to assure and ensure that this does not happen again.

Secondly I would like this incident be shared with other zoos to help them avoid a similar event.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

Bob

Robert Nitschke

208 351-8465

[rnitschke.phys72@gtalumni.org](mailto:rnitschke.phys72@gtalumni.org)



This email was sent to the USDA/APHIS on June 25, 2024

To USDA Animal Care

I would like to report a near fatal incident at the Idaho Falls Zoo on Sunday June 9th at approximately 10 am. I was cleaning the exhibit when I looked up to see Kimani, the lioness, two feet away!!!!

Somehow she had gotten into the exhibit. It took everything I had to back away and hold her off with the shovel. I backed down the hill to the bottom of the exhibit and slowly made my way along the east wall of the exhibit and up the north side to the gate. She followed closely the whole way, being very curious but thankfully not overly aggressive. I keep saying: "No Kimani, No Kimani"... Getting the door open while holding the shovel to keep her from escaping was very difficult. Miraculously I made it out, unharmed but definitely in shock!

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# APPENDIX B

Emails to the Mayor

7/15/2024, 7/22/2024

and

8/5/2024



Email sent to the mayor 7/15/2024

Hi Mayor Casper,

I hope that you are keeping cool and doing well. I missed not being able to talk to you directly a couple of weeks ago about my concerns with the investigative path for the June 9 lion incident at the Idaho Falls Zoo. I do thank you for arranging me to speak with your Chief of Staff. I was able to share several concerns. The one concern that is most troubling is that the zoo refuses to conduct an independent review of the accident.

As you may recall, the city, the zoo and of course me are damn lucky that this incident did not result in a mauling, death or even harm to the public. There was an opportunity for the lion to have escaped, the zoo was open to the public and the kid's zoo is directly across from the lion exhibit. How grateful we all should be. As such the city needs to take advantage of this opportunity to conduct a rigorous and thorough independent investigation and assure that this never happens again.

Since there has been reluctance by the zoo to conduct an independent review I have taken the liberty to highlight a few textbook key points that indicate how independence plays a critical role in an accident investigation:

**unbiased evaluation** - free of potential conflicts of interest and internal biases

**expert insight** - experienced accident investigators can offer in-depth knowledge and analysis,

**credibility and transparency** - enhances the credibility of the process and demonstrates a commitment to transparency and accountability which can help maintain trust and confidence

**employee and public reassurance** - reassures employees and the public that the zoo is taking the accident seriously and is

committed to preventing future occurrences which can improve moral and trust

**Improvement of safety practices** - offer recommendations for preventing future accidents based on an impartial assessment

The zoo insists that their own internal review followed by a review from a few handpicked external people is sufficient. This could not be farther from the truth. They said they had to complete a report to the AZA in 30 days but that hasn't happened. They have chosen not to even interview me: The person who was present, the person who has ~ 14 years of experience at the zoo (longer than any zoo staff), and who has extensive nuclear and environmental safety and risk analysis experience!

The zoo peoples might mean well but they are not workplace safety experts, they are not accident investigators, they are not independent and they have not demonstrated that this in-house procedure works. Case in point, there have been at least two previous incidents that I am aware of where had there been an adequate review and corrective action taken the June 9th incident would not have happened.

The first incident happened about 5 or 6 years ago and involved the tiger exhibit. The personnel doors to the exhibit were found open and unattended. Had the keeper not checked the exhibit before letting the tiger out, the tiger would have had access to the public spaces of the zoo. I was not privy to what the details were, what notifications, if any, were made to the AZA or USDA, or what investigation was done. The only corrective action I am aware of is the keeper received some time off.

The second incident happened about two or three years ago, and involved the serval exhibit and is almost identical to the June 9th incident. In this instance, the keeper had moved the servals to

their holding to feed them. Then the keeper and I began cleaning in the exhibit. A few minutes later I looked up and suddenly there were two servals! We quickly exited the exhibit. Not near as unnerving as the lion, since they weigh 20 to 30 times less and Bahati was at one time an ambassador animal. Again I do not know what, if any, notifications were made to the AZA or USDA, or what if any follow up investigation was conducted. I am not aware of any correction action.

One can only speculate on how many other near misses there have been. I am only there one day a week and there's been a near miss frequency of about once every two years these last 6 years. It does say that the current zoo safety program is inadequate!

This is a call to action for the city of Idaho Falls to establish an independent review of the June 9th incident . Show the employees and the public that the city is committed to not only uncovering the true causes and preventing recurrence but also demonstrate a commitment to maintaining high standards of safety and responsibility.

I look forward to your positive actions and am happy to answer additional questions or provide assistance to make an independent review happen.

Sincerely,

Bob Nitschke

Re: June 9th lion incident - independent review. 7/16/2024

Rebecca Casper<RCasper@idahofalls.gov>

To: You

Cc:Margaret Wimborne; Michael Kirkham

Thank you Bob. I am actually out on City travel right now.

I do appreciate your message. I ask for some time to get a full updated briefing on this. I was of course aware of the original incident and relieved that you were safe. I have been allowing the wheels to turn as directed by the AZA. I have not yet met with PJ personally since the event, but have been in touch with other city staff who are working on this.

I fully appreciate your point about independence and can tell you that what you suggest is similar in nature to the processes we follow when we investigate officer-involved shootings. The P&R department is not as familiar with processes and protocols like that. So as you might imagine, introducing them into that department's culture will take time. Even the AZA does not demand the same degree of rigor that you recommend. Your teeth were cut in the nuclear world, where the culture demands the highest possible standards of rigor. Please give space for defensible and reasonable differences.

Thank you also for the history. I was not aware of what you have experienced. This will be considered as well.

Lastly, I can tell you that we still have an open investigation. More has been accomplished than you might realize. I just can't string it all together perfectly just now.

In sum, I surely commit to getting involved, but I can't make precise promises to you or anyone just yet. I am grateful for your

input. I respect your frustrations. Thank you for trusting me to do some learning and ask some questions.

Best,  
Rebecca

Rebecca Casper  
Mayor, City of Idaho Falls  
208-716-8686



**Rebecca Casper, Ph.D.** | *Mayor*

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Email sent to the mayor 7/22/2024

Hi Mayor Casper,

I thank you for your timely and thoughtful response to my request for an independent review of the lion incident. Especially appreciate you taking the time while on the road.

I had limited my communication to only one of my concerns: the need for an independent review thinking that would be a sure thing we could agree on and if implemented it would uncover my additional concerns. Obviously this isn't the case. The zoo continues with their "faux" independent process: deciding what the investigation should entail, how it should be conducted, presenting the information that they want to present, and then submitting to a few hand picked reviewers for their blessing. I understand a report has also been presented to the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) Accreditation Staff. More on the AZA later.

So I will put another log on the fire. My overarching concern is either the zoo's lack of understanding or appreciation of the risk posed to public by the housing of apex predators (lions, tiger, snow leopards and sloth bears) in the middle of the city with the Kid's Zoo just feet away. While not strictly an apex predator, I've included the sloth bear because it is one bad ass and has been known to fend off tigers. I would venture there is no more potentially dangerous facility/activity to the public in Idaho Falls. If you were to propose this configuration today, substituting apex predators with convicted murderers, you would have to answer the question: Are you MAD?!

The existing safety situation has numerous single points of failure that are totally dependent upon administrative controls (the least

reliable of any of the types of safety measures) for avoiding potentially catastrophic events. There are no alarms, interlocks, redundancies, etc. to prevent or lessen the likelihood of an undesirable event. This situation has persisted for years and even past near misses have not resulted in meaningful changes. This failure to appreciate the high risk situation and the fragility of the administrative controls allowed the decision to give the keys to the carnivore castle to a brand new employee with no prior zoo experience and limited work experience.

I have typically received four basic responses to questions about safety: This is how we have done it for years and it's working; this is how other zoos do it; we are not a nuclear site and lastly we have the AZA stamp of approval so it has to be okay.

It is clear the first two responses are woefully inadequate and border on being meaningless. I find the nuclear site comment particularly enlightening. They obviously know little about the site's safety program or the fact that site has never had nor will ever have an activity that is even close to the risk posed to the public that the zoo presents. This leaves us with the AZA seal of approval.

I question the adequacy of the AZA approval process with regards to the safety of housing apex predators based on 5 quick observations:

- 1.The AZA is not an independent body. They are a non-profit, non-regulatory body that has interests directly tied to the Zoo. The City sends them over \$12,000 a year to be part of the AZA club.

- 2.The AZA Accreditation Standards only have policy statements regarding safety. For example: 11.5.3. Institutions maintaining

potentially dangerous animals must have appropriate safety procedures in place to prevent attacks and injuries by these animals. And: 11.4.1. A written risk management plan must be developed and implemented. And: 11.1.2.1. The institution must have an occupational health and safety program. These statements are necessary but insufficient on specifying exactly what the content needs to be, what are the acceptance levels and what are acceptable methodologies to achieve the level of safety etc.

3.The AZA organization chart only shows 3 young people for the accreditation staff. I believe there are over 230 accredited institutions and 13 different standard categories of which Safety is one. Seems woefully inadequate. Especially since they claimed they looked into 72 incident reports and 149 complaints last year. There is no indication of their educational background and experience.

4.The AZA is very private and operates under a veil of strict confidentiality. For instance with regards to reporting a concern: "...to preserve the integrity of our process, all findings will remain confidential. This procedural guarantee of confidentiality allows AZA, as an accrediting organization, access to restricted materials, and creates a safe platform for communication between the AZA Accreditation Commission and AZA member institutions. By extending confidentiality, an accrediting body can more accurately get at the truth of a matter so that a correct and informed decision can be made, and appropriate action taken. Although we will not be able to share the results of our inquiry with you, please know that we will look into your concerns, and if we find that any accreditation standards are not being maintained, we will work with the institution to assure the issues are properly

addressed.” There is no information on how well any of this is done. There is a long history of institutions that self police themselves and share no information from churches to scouting organizations, industry and even the Supreme Court. This has resulted in massive abuses and calls into questions like trust and credibility. And if one were a cynic one might think that the membership dues are more like hush money.

5. Quis custodiet ipsos custodes? Who watches the watcher? What oversees the AZA and what assurance is there that their accreditation assures adequate safety measures are in place?

I could go on, there are other shortcomings dealing with reporting and so on but for the reasons I have stated above, I would ask that the City of Idaho Falls take it upon themselves to take the necessary steps to be able assure the citizens of Idaho Falls, the visitors to the zoo and the employees and volunteers of the zoo that they will not be put in harms way. If this is too much to ask, as I explained to the Parks and Recreation Director, the Zoo could just arrange with the AZA to transfer the apex predators to other zoos. There is no requirement to have them. There are plenty of other deserving animals, not dangerous, that could take their place and then the safety measures will be minimal.

If you have any questions or if I can help in any way to make the zoo safer, please let me know.

Sincerely,  
Bob

RE: Another log on the fire Re: June 9th lion incident -  
independent review 7/29/2024

Rebecca Casper<RCasper@idahofalls.gov>

To: You

Cc: Margaret Wimborne

Bob—

I apologize for taking so long to write back. This has been an exceptionally busy season and whenever I get the time, I catch up as I am able. Thank you for this latest email. I appreciate your perspective, and I also appreciate how you reason. Your writing style is engaging and you communicate very well.

I suspect this entire experience was upsetting for you on quite a few levels. You have given a great deal of your time and talent to the Parks and Rec Department for many years. Now you just want to be heard. And while I am not the Parks and Recreation Department, I can tell you I am listening. I have taken note of your concerns. And, in fact, I have had some of the same questions.

However, one difference is that I am not as impatient for changes to be implemented as you are—I have learned in my decade of public service how long it can take for the City wheels to turn. Once we flip into an analytical mode, time is no longer a driver. That may seem like an excuse, but it is not. Some of this may be a result of my influence. I place a high priority on using best practice and being data-driven. City Directors and supervisors feel that pressure. They know that when I ask questions, I am looking for the rich answers. That serves us well, except when we are in unfamiliar territory or when institutional change is called for. The slowness also helps us to avoid unintended consequences.



While the City does not have much in the way of bureaucracy, it does take time for employees and their supervisors to consider carefully the options available. Assessing costs and resource availability is one factor. Another might be the need for new expertise to be obtained—someone might have to study up on issues, rules, or processes that are less familiar. When a situation has not been encountered before, it is even slower. We ask how other like organizations have dealt with similar problems. How did that work out? New processes may have to be invented. No one wants to be wrong. And sometimes the learning cycle may need to be repeated by the next line of authority. Legal and political concerns are also factored in. How will the community received the changes? Will it change other things? How will affect the strategic plan? And so on. Everyone involved tend to move carefully trying to balance sometimes competing considerations. All of this can easily take a month or more. (As slow and careful as it is, we both know this is much faster than state and federal processes.)

With that said, I have asked my own questions about the incident. I find myself satisfied with the answers I have received. I am assuming that I may be working from newer information than you have.

1. The City is, in fact, seeking outside review(s) at our own expense and not through AZA. I have specifically asked that you be interviewed by the outside reviewers.
2. We will still also pursue a review from the AZA. (I believe they are a far better organization than your assessment below would suggest. I have seen them withhold accreditation. I have been interviewed by an AZA assessment team. I have experienced some of their investigative processes. This organization works very hard to improve conditions and assure animal welfare. I have not

studied their organization model well enough to finish this sentence with full confidence, but my intuition tells me that the AZA works to help each of its members succeed because they all know that one zoo's failure can become every zoos' failure. And because zoos do a great deal of good in society, they don't want to punish failings, so much as they want to correct them. I do not believe this is a sign of a failed organization as you suggest with the Quis custodiet ipsos custodes? Quote below. The AZA has an incentive to roots out problems and eliminate them. And if, in the process, the limits of best practice are pushed and standards are raised, so much the better. In short—I see great value in having the AZA come in and study the issue with us. Their institutional memory and instincts will doubtless be helpful.

3. What about The Zoo's Protocols?

- In the case at hand—your case—we know that the existing protocols were not followed. Natural consequences and employment standards have eliminated that from happening again.
- But, were the protocols the right ones if they could have been so easily circumvented? Probably not. And this is why the protocols are being revised.

4. What else can we do beside rely solely on one person's "obedience" when it comes to safety?

- More training—that is being designed even as rules and protocols are being changed.
- Reduction—if not outright elimination—of situations where an employee is working alone in a space where predatory animals are located.
- Installation and implementation of physical and visual cues and indicators of safety (that have nothing to do with following checklists). I think some of these show great promise for ensuring increased safety.

5. What else can we do? We stand ready to implement the other useful suggestions that may come from the various reviews.

Bob, please know that I have not recently spoken with PJ or David about all of these changes. I have received most of my recent information from my Chief of Staff, Margaret Wimborne, who has been tracking the zoo's progress. For this reason, I cannot speak of timelines. I do not know how soon you may be contacted. But in the meantime, I encourage you to trust that we are moving in the right direction. Again, it is not a quick endeavor.

You have been a change agent before, and I invite you to keep at it. I have seen that your style is to be brutally honest and push hard. I appreciate this very much right now. I believe this is the right place to do just that. Please share all of your concerns with the third party investigative team(s). Let us have the benefit of your insight and experience, your doubts and worries, and your emotion and reason. But when the dust settles and we have the report(s), I also invite you to receive the findings thoughtfully and give room for perspectives besides your own.

Finally, a word about having "apex predators" at the Idaho Falls Zoo. Is the risk necessary? The answer is no, but the rewards are high. I am not talking about monetary rewards, but the social rewards of having a zoo that educates minds, elevates and informs thinking, and thrills and inspires people to get outside of themselves and appreciate the world they live in. More and more as we see an entire generation sink into a digital and technology-driven existence, we need our zoos and other outdoor spaces to refresh us and remind us of what it is to be human. I know you also know and appreciate this. I suspect this is partly why our zoo has been able to benefit from years of your volunteer service.

I too hope we do not choose to eliminate some of the most thrilling and beautiful creatures from our zoo simply because of risk. If I may simply point out that human life is fraught with risk. Consider what it takes to drive a car on public streets. Driving relies on safety engineering (roadway design) social engineering (speed limits). Add to that we have laws and rules to govern the drivers in the other cars. We can only trust and hope that they can see well, read the signs, know the laws, and are not in some way physically impaired by alcohol or medications. We also trust that they are insured. We have laws, expectations, and safety protocols around all of these aspects of driving, yet we must trust people to abide by the rules and expectations. This is what allows me to leave point A and get to point B in one piece. Sure, I could walk, but I prefer not to because I can do more and be more when I am not spending all of my time walking.

At the zoo, we must do all that is reasonable to ensure that we have can trust in the experience and feel it will be both rewarding and safe. I wish to mitigate the risks we can and should without bankrupting the enterprise. I hope you will help us find that balance. And even if we ultimately do not agree on every point, I am hopeful that we all will land in the “zone” of what is reasonable and achievable.

Please stay in touch.

Best,  
Rebecca



**Rebecca Casper, Ph.D.** | *Mayor*

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Email sent to the mayor 8/5/2024

SUBJECT: And now this

Thanks Mayor once again for your thoughtful and detailed response. You have not made it easy for an ancient one to respond : ).

By the way, I think we are rapidly approaching a record for email badminton. On the plus side, this email thread is getting long enough to make T-shirts for our Apex friends : )

I will take this opportunity to comment on a few of your points and include a suggestion or two.

First of all, I greatly appreciate your recognition of my desire to be heard. I appreciate even more your willingness to respond, not just listen. I think this characteristic has served both you and the city well during your mayoral tenure.

A second item, which you pointed out, is we definitely agree on the value of zoos and yes having majestic apex predators. With regards to the question “is the risk necessary” I would suggest that it is the wrong question to ask. As you state in the following paragraph “life is fraught with risk.” The questions really should be: can you correctly and completely describe the risks and if so can you properly managed those risks so they are acceptable to the public.

The third item I strongly agree with is “I hope you will help us ...”. I had a good friend ask me what I wanted out of this experience. A very good question. I told her that I wanted to leave the zoo safer. I know that my volunteer days are numbered. I just want that number to be bigger than 1! So yes I am happy to provide any assistance you would like.

Now to areas of lesser agreement.

With regards to the “pace of play,” suggesting impatience on my part, I have not forgotten my time in the nuclear wonderland. Many times I had to remind myself that by working there, I had bought a ticket on a barge and it was only going to go ~3 miles per hour, tops. And changing course would be difficult. So I will agree with you that after certain safety triage measures were taken there is time to optimize the path forward and implement more robust and resilient measures.

With that being said, what becomes most important is the subsequent direction and execution, not speed. If the right people are not doing the right thing or not doing it in the right way, it won't matter how long they take, the results will be inadequate. With regards to the right people, as I mentioned before, I think it was a mistake to not conduct an independent investigation from the start. As you may recall, almost the first words from President Biden to the American public regarding the horrific and near fatal assassination attempt were: we will conduct an independent investigation and make the results public.

With regards to public disclosure, after two months the zoo has not informed the public at all. This was and is a big mistake. It would appear the zoo criterion for informing the public is only if someone is “really most sincerely dead!” This is no way to build trust and credibility in the institution or the process. This is no way to demonstrate that safety is first. This behavior does not belong in an administration that believes in and supports open and transparent governance.

On June 10th, a brief announcement should have been delivered saying something like the zoo averted a major safety incident yesterday due to the courageous and cool-headed actions of an ancient volunteer and a considerable amount of luck. Okay maybe not those words, but acknowledging that the safety envelope was compromised, that immediate steps were taken to mitigate the situation and that a thorough investigation has begun should have been announced. Then when the initial report had been sent to the AZA, another announcement should have been issued stating the highlights of the investigation to date and providing a link to the initial report in case the public would like more information. I know that no volunteers were informed of the incident until almost a month passed. And if they didn't attend the volunteer meeting on the eve of 4th of July they still haven't been told. Safety first, or maybe not.

With respect to are things being done properly, when I asked if there was a procedure for conducting the accident investigation, I was originally told there was one. When I later asked to see it, I was told there wasn't one. How an investigation is conducted, what lines of inquiry are chosen, how deep and wide do they probe etc. will dictate the conclusions that are drawn. I find it interesting that the AZA evidently does not have a procedure or why didn't the zoo choose to use it.

Similarly, I was told two senior people from the Boise zoo were coming and was asked if I would like to talk to them. Probably because you told them to, since they have chosen not to talk to me at all. I then asked what was their scope of work was and what their deliverable would be. I was told there was

none, the zoo just wanted their input? Then he added that they were not being paid. Go figure.

All too cavalier! The processes should be structured and systematic.

As an aside I thought my meeting with the Boise folks was a waste of the few minutes that were allotted. After a perfunctory discussion of the actual accident, they proceeded to ask questions about the volunteer program and my experience with the lion friends. Not germane at all. I tried to get them to answer questions about the AZA particularly the safety standards and why the AZA accreditation had not help prevent the incident. It appears that if you are in the AZA family you can only give out your name, rank, and serial number :( I did send them an email asking if they would send me a copy of the standards and copied the Zoo Director. No one responded.

I think that zoos, since most every one likes animals, has escaped the type of safety consideration that other less popular activities get. It is why places like Ligertown in Idaho sprung up and we all know how that turned out.

You seem to suggest that I thought the AZA should not be involved at all. That was never my point. If anything, I thought they should have been more involved. I just know that they made it clear to me when I submitted my incident report that they would decide if they chose to get involved and in any case they would not tell me if or what they chose to do.

You do make a strong case for the AZA but there is a strong symbiotic relationship. You both need each other. I am not saying that it can't work, it just has great potential to become

corrupt. I can't trust an organization that self polices itself, has strict confidentiality procedures, refuses to make their standards public etc. without evidence that they are indeed doing a good job. Testimonials without substance are like Amazon reviews. Beware. Zoos are public facilities, mainly funded by public dollars with direct health and safety impacts to employees, support staff and the public. The public has the right to know just how safe their zoo is and what steps are taken to assure and maintain that level of safety.

To help bridge this dichotomy of opinion about the AZA, I would like to suggest that you convene a small group say two Parks and Rec Commissioners (me and Chris White) and your chief of staff. The objective would be to conduct a desk top review of the policies, standards, and examples that pertain to the Safety Section of the Accreditation Document. Of particular interest would be how they address single points of failure, how frequent they update their standards, what safety analytical tools they recommend; what has been their involvement in safety specific matters at our zoo etc. We could also give a separate evaluation of how well the zoo's revised documents comply with the standards. We would then give you a report of our conclusions and recommendations as to whether further investigation is needed or not.

A couple of times you expressed concerns about costs or possible costs. I have a few quick questions first. One, how much is a keeper's arm worth? Two, how much is a volunteer's life worth? Three, how much is public trust worth? The costs will be what they need to be. If we can't afford them, then it's time to send the animals away. For what it's worth I can't envision great costs. Thousands of dollars maybe, not



millions. Depends upon what you choose to do and what level of risk you decide is acceptable which leads us to (drum roll )

The elephant in the room.

I know the AZA has standards for our gray pachyderm friends but doubt if they have addressed the subspecies “elephantus in locus.”

Which in our case is the “acceptable level of risk” from apex predators at a zoo. You can tell me if the city has established an acceptable level of risk for what I will call a LOLA (Loss of Lion Accident). I would guess it hasn’t. So we don’t know what level of safety we need to meet and as importantly no one knows what the present levels of risk to the employee and public are.

So what are we to do? The present strategy appears to is to count on the AZA accreditation as being protective enough. I don’t know how far that would go in a courtroom. I do know how I would respond if I were the judge. It would be interesting to know if the AZA has established acceptable risk levels and if so how they arrived at them. The standards are probably just based on best practices.

This is all the more reason why the City needs to do due diligence to know just how effective the AZA is. Based on what we find out the zoo might want to commission a formal risk analysis. Fortunately the zoo is a very simple system.

A much cheaper way would be to make the following song the zoo theme song (with apologies to Jay and Ray, and Doris Day):

When I was just a little school kid

I asked the keeper what will happen to me?

Will I be eaten? Will I be bit?

Here is what the keeper said to me

Que sera, sera

Whatever will be, will be

The future's not ours to see

Que sera, sera

What will be, will be

Sincerely,

Bob

# APPENDIX C

Presentations to the City Council

8/22/24, 9/12/2024 and 1/9/2025

8/22/2024

City Council President, Members, Mayor

I thank you for your service. I would not trade places with you and I would suspect you would not have traded places with me on June 9th. That was the day I was confronted with the lioness in the lion exhibit at the Idaho Falls zoo. I don't know what you know about the incident but my purpose here is to express my concern about safety at the zoo, that it has not been adequately characterized and managed, and that it has not been communicated to the public.

The zoo is a signature attraction for the city and quality of life amenity for the citizens and yet it also poses the greatest risk to the workers and public as any other facility/activity in the city. It could be described as a maximum security prison for our apex predator friends (lions, tiger, snow leopards and sloth bears) and we put it next to the kid's zoo and invite school kids and the public to wander by. As such it requires a robust and rigorous safety analysis that identifies all plausible accident scenarios and evaluates the safety measures needed to reduce the risk to as low as possible. To my knowledge and dismay this has not been done.

The zoo takes the position that if they are accredited by the AZA that is sufficient. Obviously that is not the case.

With regards to public disclosure, after over two months the zoo has not informed the public at all. This was and is a big mistake. It would appear the zoo criterion for informing the public is only if someone is "really most sincerely dead!" This is no way to build trust and credibility in the institution or the process. This is no way to demonstrate that safety is first. This behavior does not

belong in an administration that believes in and supports open and transparent governance.

Every day that passes by the zoo loses a little more trust and credibility. The zoo is a public place, funded by public dollars. As such the public is entitled to and deserves to know what those risks are and how the zoo manages those risks so everyone can go home safely.

I have exchanged emails with the mayor about these concerns. Much work remains to be done. I also have talked once, about a month ago with Commissioners Francis and Ziel-Dingman. I look to the City Council to provide oversight and assurance that the final actions that are taken result in a zoo that is safe for one and all.

I would also ask that you add the lion incident as a discussion item to the next City Council Meeting and invite the zoo to present their findings, their actions, their rationale for not informing the public, how they are assured their actions are sufficient to prevent not only this type of incident from happening but all other plausible events and answer questions from the Council and the public.

I will commit to providing a much more detailed evaluation of safety at the zoo, as well as concerns and observations about animal welfare, the zoo management and possibly recommendations for improving the visitor experience.

Thank you.

9/12/2024

City Council President, Members and Mayor

I wanted to respond to the Mayor's response to my public comment at the last city council meeting. But of course that wouldn't have been allowed. So here is another shot across the bow. In the past two weeks the Executive Director of the Zoo has been telling the media and also in a summary to the Parks and Recreation Commission that "the zoo did nothing wrong." "All physical facilities were and are functioning appropriately, appropriate protocols and policies were in place, and the keeper had received the training to prevent this unfortunate and dangerous incident." Obviously NOT! The zoo's overarching safety requirement is that the apex predators and people (public and staff) are never in the same space. If that happens, and it did, the zoo has failed!

There was another event that took place July 6th that you may recall that almost resulted in the near death of a former president. Can you imagine the outrage that would have ensued if the head of the Secret Service had said that they did nothing wrong, that they had followed all their procedures, that all their people were trained and equipped. The public would have asked for their head! Actually that is what happened, the director resigned!

The Parks & Rec summary stated that the cause of the incident was human error. No surprise here since I've seen estimates of human errors being responsible for 70 to 80% of zoo incidents. While human error was indeed involved it was not the only cause or even the root cause.

I have not been permitted to see the report to the AZA. But if this is the picture that is painted it is wrong. This is what happens when you have the people that were in charge evaluate their own performance. People that are not familiar with accident

investigation, people that are not familiar with root cause analysis and people that are not independent should not be in charge of the incident investigation. This is exactly why we don't let students grade their own work!

What are other causes of the incident? Here are a few that come quickly to mind:

Giving the keys to the carnivore castle to a brand new young employee with no previous zoo experience

Inadequate design of the apex predator facilities. Having single points of failure only prevented by administrative controls.  
Having one keeper with one key

Inadequate oversight of the facility design and operations by all parties: the zoo itself, USDA APHIS, AZA and the City of Idaho Falls. To date neither the AZA or the USDA has done any investigation!

Inadequate procedures

Inadequate training -Lack of appreciation of just how dangerous the situation is

Inadequate lessons learned from previous events: serval and tiger here and the fatal accidents that have happened elsewhere

Inadequate reporting - Ironically if I had not reported the initial incident it might have never been reported. Similarly if I had not addressed the city council, the public might have never known how close they were to a "cat-astrophy." The executive director said that staff and volunteers were quickly notified. This is not true. The first the volunteers were informed was almost a month later. I know at least one staff member had not heard of the event one week later. The public was not informed for 3 months.

The zoo has implicitly acknowledged some of these failures by actions they have taken. How good they are, I don't know. I have only got to see a short edited version prepared for the Parks & Rec Commission.

How about other zoo failures that surfaced because of this incident: Inadequate response. I was told by the Parks and Recreation Director that there were four people that were qualified to use lethal force but not one was at the zoo at the time.

The bottom line is the zoo needs to be acknowledge their failures. A critical step in any recovery is the recognition that you have a problem. Saying that you did nothing wrong is delusional and irresponsible.



Presentation to City Council - January 9, 2025

City Council President, Members, Mayor

I am Bob Nitschke, long time resident of Idaho Falls and frequent public outcrier! I think I should be eligible for some sort of award, merit badge maybe. Let us begin round 3 of the lion encounter of the most horrible kind. As you may recall the first two rounds I tried to force feed the Council with information by reading as fast as I could to stay within the 3 meeting time limit established for the unwashed to address the high table. This time you will have a reading assignment you can complete at your leisure.

Coincidentally this is my 7 month I'm not dead yet anniversary!

As you may recall I promised to provide the Council a more detailed evaluation of safety at the zoo, as well as concerns and observations about animal welfare and zoo management.

I am happy to report that the evaluation has been completed.  
Idaho Falls Zoo - None Dare Call it Safe! - A Volunteer's Experiences and Musings about Management Failures and Fiascos at the Idaho Falls Zoo

I cover the lion incident failure both before and now, other safety management failures, animal welfare failures, other management failures - leadership, personnel, project management planning, failure of management oversight, and now what and reflections

This report will save me from having to stand on a street corner with a sign saying All Zoo Lives Matter!

I consider this report to be my child that I am sending out into the cruel world to fight injustice at the Idaho Falls Zoo and elsewhere.

That injustice is innocent people being unnecessarily killed or maimed by our apex predator friends because of incompetence and negligence on the part of zoo management.

I took great pains to prepare the child to withstand the slings and arrows that all bearers of bad tidings must face. The kill the messenger syndrome. There are detailed and specific examples of each position taken and conclusion drawn. This should protect the child from spurious unfounded attacks.

This report is mine and mine alone. I did receive a sanity check last night from two distinguished members of my Brain Trust. So I feel comfortable that the time is right for the rest of the world to know what I know. Not sure all will be able to handle the truth but c'est la vie.

Of course if I were a billionaire like Elon Musk I would just buy the zoo and fix it myself. But as a poor retiree on a fixed and falling income I can only prepare a report that accurately and passionately documents the current situation and hope that the City will care enough about the animal friends at the zoo, the people that work there and the people that visit to address the problems in a timely appropriate and complete manner.

I had planned to surprise the council with their very own hard copy but I was surprised to find out my one copy cost \$22.05 so you will be getting an electronic copy tomorrow.

Thank you

## APPENDIX D

Guest Editorial sent to the Post Register  
(Unpublished)

ROBERT L NITSCHKE <[rlnitschke@msn.com](mailto:rlnitschke@msn.com)>

To: [columnist@postregister.com](mailto:columnist@postregister.com)

Sun 9/1/2024

Cc: [jmiller@postregister.com](mailto:jmiller@postregister.com); Robert Nitschke

I had to change one word in my previous submittal and provide my complete contact information

Bob Nitschke

1310 Corinne Ave

Idaho Falls, ID 83402

208 351-8465

Preferred email [rnitschke.phys72@gtalumni.org](mailto:rnitschke.phys72@gtalumni.org)

I am Bob Nitschke and I would like to submit the following guest column for your consideration.

Just how safe is the Idaho Falls Zoo?

Such an interesting question about the signature attraction of Idaho Falls. There are two things that can be “safely” said: 1) The zoo will not tell you and 2) They do not how safe the zoo is. On the morning of June 9th while cleaning the lion exhibit, I looked up to see the female lion a couple of feet away. I touched her with the shovel. Thanks to an abundance of good luck, I was able to escape unharmed and without letting the lion escape. This was not reported to zoo management until I reported it 12 hours later. As of today the zoo has not informed the public. Although there are simple explanations for the immediate cause of the incident, there are many underlying concerns. For example, why is the design so fragile that a single error could result in a catastrophe: a frightened lion loose in the public space filled with children! Why was the newest and least experienced employee given the keys

to the carnivore castle? Arguably the most critical safety position at the zoo and maybe even the city.

The zoo likes to tout their Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) accreditation as proof that they are a safe facility. This incident proves otherwise. Further when I tried to find out what the AZA standards for safety are I could only find a couple of declarative statements. Hardly a standard. It gets worse, the zoo superintendent said there could not be standards because all zoos are different! Better not tell him that all bridges are different.

It is incumbent upon the city to conduct a formal independent safety analysis and risk assessment. While this may sound daunting, the system being evaluated is simple: doors, locks, apex predators, enclosures and staff. It is ironic that a community that owes a large part of its success to the exemplary safety record of the Navy Nuclear Program and the Idaho National Laboratory treats the safety of the zoo in what could only be described as cavalier: not conducting an independent investigation, not informing the public, not recognizing this as a workplace safety issue that requires the review by safety and risk professionals not just zoo people. There have been a couple of similar incidents in the recent past that had they been reported, investigated and proper corrective action taken this recent episode could have been averted.

The city owes the visiting public and the zoo staff a complete description of the risks of having apex predators at the zoo and the safety measures that are in place to prevent harm to the public and staff. To paraphrase the byline for the Washington Post: Safety dies in darkness!

## Bio

Long time resident of Idaho, 31 years at the Idaho National Lab;  
14 years zoo volunteer



# APPENDIX E

NORTH CAROLINA ZOO

FATAL LION ATTACK



# Fatal lion attack nets “3 serious” violations for Center

by Amanda Morris

Associated Press

Posted: June 28, 2019/09:36 PM EDT

Updated: June 28, 2019/09:56 PM EDT

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — North Carolina labor officials have cited an animal sanctuary for safety violations after a lion fatally mauled a 22-year old intern last December.

The state Occupational Safety and Health Division issued a citation Thursday for three “serious” violations to the Conservator’s Center in Caswell County.

Because Alexandra Black was an unpaid intern, the division could not issue a direct citation for her death, according to an emailed statement from the state labor department. Officials issued a citation after determining that other employees were exposed to hazards.

The citation said that all violations must be corrected immediately. The center also must pay penalties of \$3,000. In an investigation following Black’s death , the division found that the center had “ineffective procedures which resulted in a lion escaping,” and constituted a violation of the state’s Occupational Safety and Health Act.

To protect employees, the citation said the center should change its procedures to match guidelines from the Association of Zoos & Aquariums and/or the North Carolina Zoo. These standards include using two keepers to move lions and not depending solely on mechanical safety measures to verify that all doors are correctly locked.

The division also cited the center for not regularly inspecting and repairing the animal enclosure and said the center must maintain a preventive maintenance program to ensure that the animal enclosures function properly.

It's unclear how a 14-year-old male lion named Matthai escaped and pulled Black back into his enclosure last December, where he dragged her around by the neck.

The medical examiner's report said it's possible a 28-inch wide lions' play ball blocked the gate. The center has denied that, but offered no alternative explanation.

The third violation from the center was an "inadequate emergency response plan." The citation states the center "would be better equipped to quickly address an escape by a dangerous animal if it kept lethal weapons on site." The citation also said the center should have a 'shoot to kill' policy if employees are at risk, and staff should undergo regular drills on what to do in the event of an escape.

After Black was attacked, firefighters first tried to spray the lion with water from firehoses, and then center staff failed numerous attempts to tranquilize the lion, according to a Caswell County sheriff's report.

In a letter urging lawmakers to enforce stricter regulations on animal facilities, the intern's aunt, Virginia Black wrote, "It seems clear that if the center had a real plan for how it would react in such a situation, it had rarely or never been practiced."

She said the center's priority was protecting the lion and wonders whether her niece could have been saved.

When reached by phone, the center's executive director Mindy Stinner declined to comment and referred the Associated Press to the center's lawyer. The lawyer did not immediately respond to email or multiple phone calls.

# APPENDIX F

## Boise Zoo Tiger Attack

# Tiger Attacks Woman at Fund-Raiser

ByABC News

August 12, 2000, 10:24 AM

B O I S E, Idaho. Aug. 12 -- A woman was mauled by a tiger at a fund-raiser for Zoo Boise after the cat slipped through a cage door.

Janet C. Gold, 40, suffered a broken leg and puncture wounds in the attack and was hospitalized in serious but stable condition today, authorities said.

She also suffered a gunshot wound to the leg when police fired near the tiger to scare it away. Police are not clear whether the woman suffered the wound from a direct shot or a ricochet.

The attack occurred Friday at a "Feast for the Beast" dinner. Patrons had been taken to a building which houses the cages for two Amur tigers.

"Somehow, one of the tigers bumped open a gate on the cage and attacked the woman," said Boise Police Lt. Jim Tibbs. "Everyone else ran out."

Police Sgt. Rich Schnebly said another officer drew his gun while the woman was being attacked.

“The officer fired two shots over the tiger’s head. He couldn’t shoot at the tiger because he was afraid he would hit the woman,”Schnebly said.

The cat retreated. But when Schnebly and a zoo official approached Gold, the tiger advanced again. The policeman fired another shot, the tiger backed into the cage and the men locked the gate.

The condition of the tiger was unclear.

Zoo Boise has two male Amur tigers, the largest cats in the world. Males can weigh between 700 and 800 pounds when fully grown.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8fKoQl8XY>

If the link does not work, just use a popular search engine and look for tiger attack - Boise Zoo

## APPENDIX G

Emails about snow and ice



Hazardous work conditions

From ROBERT L

Date Mon1/2/2023

To David Pennock

Cc PJ Holm

Hi David,

I hope you and your family had a nice holiday.

The conditions at the zoo today were very hazardous and unsafe for the employees. There was ice literally everywhere: from the Admin office across the parking lot and former 4H area and throughout the zoo. I can only speak in detail about Area 4 but it was treacherous. The new waste cart I was using literally slid across an icy area on its own. Not only were the main pathways icy but the keeper trails were rutted, icy and slick.

This situation is made much worse because no one stayed on top of snow removal this last week these conditions will persist for some time. Sand and salt need to be applied throughout the zoo immediately to help lessen the risk to employees. And as soon as the temperature gets near freezing or above, every effort needs to be made to remove the snow and ice from all the pathways and keeper trails. And then that needs to be the standard for the rest of the winter season. The employees deserve the best safety conditions possible. As you know, falls are one of the top causes of accidents for employees.

Further, steps need to be taken to prevent these extremely hazardous work conditions from happening again. Holidays or lack of staff or Idaho winters CAN NOT be an excuse for compromising the safety of the employees. I truly hope no employee has to get hurt before changes are made.

Sincerely,

Bob

RE: Hazardous work conditions

From David Pennock<dpennock@idahofallszoo.org>

Sent Tuesday, January 3, 2023

To Robert L

Cc. PJ Holm

As always Bob, thanks for your concern about the zoo and its staff. I will see what can be done. IFZ ice



From ROBERT L

Date. Mon 2/13/2023

To David Pennock

Cc. PJ Holm

Hi David,

I need to report once again the very treacherous conditions at the zoo. Although there are many places that need attention, the stretch right in front of the shop entrance is the one place that impacts everyone and should be remedied first. Even wearing yaktraxs, one slips and slides. The closest condition I can compare it to is ice in an ice cave: smooth, hard and extremely slick. Since this is the one location at the zoo where anyone who enters the zoo must cross at least a couple of times and for most of the zoo staff it will be many times a day, it needs immediate attention. See photo. This condition has persisted far longer than it should have. I took a similar picture last week. It just wasn't quite as polished as it is now but it was much longer.

There is no way you would allow the public to try to cross this icy stretch and for that same reason there is no way your employees, your most valuable assets, should have to cross this hazardous stretch. There are several things that could be done immediately. Please do so.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

Bob

RE: IFZ ice

From David Pennock<dpennock@idahofallszoo.org>  
Sent Tuesday, February 14, 2023  
To Robert L  
Cc PJ Holm;Katie Barry;Tim McCammon

Thank you for your concern Bob. I have spoken with Tim and Katie. If you would report these issues to the keeper you are working with, Katie, or Erica, they will pass them along to Tim and he will take care of the issue.Re: IFZ ice

From ROBERT L  
Sent Tuesday February 24,2023  
To David Pennock  
Cc PJ Holm;Katie Barry;Tim McCammon

I don't want to turn this into a snowball fight but your response misses my point that I more directly articulated in my original email to you on this subject. The zoo ought to have a snow and ice policy in place that is supported by a plan/procedure to assure it is implemented. Waiting until there is a hazardous condition that someone brings to someone else's attention before something is done is too reactionary and too late especially for a predictable and recurrent hazard like snow in Idaho in winter. A process needs to be in place that identifies and eliminates or

mitigates the hazard before having someone draw their attention to it.

I will throw out a quick and dirty first cut. The policy of the Idaho Falls Zoo is to have a clear and to the greatest extent possible snow and ice free path for the Keepers from their offices to their respective animal holdings. The path consists of most all the paved walkways as well as what I would call the West Wing. The West Wing would be from the shop to the tool room, zebra barn, hospital and end at the tiger holding. The path need not be the width of the entire paved walkways only wide enough for zoo keeper conveyances (wheel barrows, carts, wagons, etc.).

Separate criteria can be developed for the parking lots.

The plan would be to have the existing staff, prior to the keepers needing access to the zoo, assure such a clear path exists on any and all snow days and any and all days when there are remaining stretches of snow and ice. If due to the extent or frequency of the snow event existing staff is unable to accomplish the requisite snow and ice free condition in a timely manner, staff from other parts of the Parks and Recreation Department will be assigned to help. A separate Memorandum of Understanding can be written describing exactly how and when this labor reassignment will work.

The budget will include \$ for needed snow equipment (plows, brush attachments, shovels, etc) and supplies (sand, salt, ice melt, etc.) and will include hours for the staff to perform the necessary snow and ice removal.

A primary goal for safety is prevention. Having a policy in place with supporting processes to identify and eliminate or mitigate hazards is vital to assuring a safe workplace for the employees.

BobRE: IFZ ice

From David Pennock<dpennock@idahofallszoo.org>  
Sent February 14, 2023  
To Robert L  
Cc PJ Holm; Katie Barry; Tim McCammon

Thank you Bob for your input. Your policy suggestion is a good one and is much appreciated.

The zoo, however, already has a policy. The keepers have eyes on the entire zoo everyday. When they see a hazard such as the one you noted, they tell Tim or Katie (who informs Tim) and then Tim and his staff respond and mitigates the hazard.

Granted, not nearly as thorough as yours but effective all the same.

The reason why the ice built up in front of the shop without a quick response was not a problem with policy but simple communication. The keepers had not reported it to Tim and Tim had not been in that part of the zoo for several days so was unaware of the problem. As you know, this path in the zoo is between 2 buildings (shop, and SA barn) so melting snow puts a lot of water from the 2 roofs onto this spot quickly. In recent days of lots of snow, then melting, and then freezing again, the ice built up quickly and the keepers had not informed Tim yet. Katie and Tim inform me that it is just that simple. No snowball fight needed.

As I pointed out in the previous email, if you would like to conform to the zoo's policy, you should "report these issues to the keeper you are working with, Katie, or Erica, they will pass them along to Tim and he will take care of the issue." I truly appreciate your concern for the zoo and its extraordinary staff. As I have told you many times, if you have further questions or concerns, my door is always open. As you know, we also have a volunteer coordinator, Kathryn Farley, that is always happy to address your concerns.

David

Re: IFZ ice

From ROBERT L

Date 2/24/2023

To David Pennock

Cc. PJ Holm;Katie Barry;Tim McCammon

David, I don't think I could disagree with you more on your statement that your present method of addressing the snow and ice at the zoo is as effective as my suggested proactive approach. If it was as effective, I would not have written to you January 2 with the following: "The conditions at the zoo today were very hazardous and unsafe for the employees. There was ice literally everywhere: from the Admin office across the parking lot and former 4H area and throughout the zoo. I can only speak in detail about Area 4 but it was treacherous." Additionally, I would not have written to you yesterday with the following "Although there are MANY places that need attention, the stretch right in front of the shop entrance is the one place that impacts everyone and should be remedied first. Even wearing yaktraxs, one slips and slides. The closest condition I can compare it to is ice in an ice cave: smooth, hard and extremely slick."

Your "policy" is flawed in a few key ways. Your policy waits until not only a hazard exists but your policy is to wait until someone reports it. With snow this approach is extremely problematic. A couple of inches of fresh snow is friendly and presents little risk, but pack and polish it and you have a treacherous situation that is much more difficult to mitigate and almost impossible to eliminate. Even your recognition of the area in front of the shop being a likely high hazard, your response is that no one told us so nothing had been done. As I mentioned before "Waiting until there is a hazardous condition that someone brings to someone else's attention before something is done is too reactionary and

too late especially for a predictable and recurrent hazard like snow in Idaho in winter.”

The second key area is that you make no provision for when the task is too big for your staff to complete in a timely manner or when they are not available. Timing is everything with regards to snow. Anybody with a driveway or sidewalk knows how important that is. Snow in Idaho is both episodic and highly variable. Almost impossible to staff to cover all cases.

Your policy does not address the resources needed to make the zoo safe in the winter. It should be a line item in the budget.

Your policy does not have any safety performance objective that can be measured and its effectiveness determined. Your policy is we respond when we are made aware of it.

Bob

# APPENDIX H

## Five Year Strategic Plan Comments



Email sent 9/3/2016

Hi David,

Thanks for the opportunity to look at the draft **Five Year Strategic Plan for the Idaho Falls Zoo at Tautphaus Park**. My first impression is that the work is a very polished and professional looking document. I know a lot of hard work went into this document.

I have two big issues. The first deals with the overall plan itself. The second issue is the plan seems to focus too much on financial matters rather than on the real purpose of the zoo and misses one of the biggest needs of the zoo.

I have other comments which I will try and send separately in the next few days.

## **Plan**

When I first heard that a strategic plan was to be developed, I was unclear on just how that could be done, when as pointed out in the **Parks and Recreation Citizen Review Committee Report** the City needs to clearly articulate their vision for the Parks and Recreation Department including the zoo. This is further complicated by the fact the Department does not have a Comprehensive Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan, Tautphaus Park does not have a Master Plan and the Zoo does not have a Master Plan. It seemed premature and it still does.

The document does state the importance of a common vision, but does not say what it is.

A plan has to have a schedule. While the document says the recommendations were identified based partly on their being able to be accomplished in the coming five years that is not a schedule. More like a to do list. Later, the reader finds out that there are recommendations that are dependent upon the aforementioned Master Plans and Council approval of funding. So the to do list becomes part wish list.

A plan has to have performance metrics. There is no way to track progress on this plan.

A plan has to have a budget. No information is provided on what the recommendations will cost and if funding is available.

A lot of recommendations are vague or not measurable. For instance “improve staff facilities and working conditions” is a recommendation with no specificity.

## **Focus**

The document left me with a feeling that finances are the number one issue to be addressed by the plan. We always seem to be or have to justify financially why we have a zoo. I think this is backwards or maybe even an inappropriate measure. The city has already affirmed their support for a zoo. It is up to the plan to help ensure that their support is used as effectively and efficiently as possible. To the degree that the zoo can offset some of the costs is very beneficial and should be encouraged but not at the risk of compromising the real purpose of the zoo which is conservation followed by education and lastly entertainment.

I think you have it right that the number 1 priority has to be on what you called “Strengthen the Foundation.” However, the section seems to focus on personnel/organizational and financial

matters. Of all possible issues, the plan needs to address more specifically the “elephant” in the room. The zoo is not in good shape. We should not continue to paint a picture that says all is okay, could be better but okay.

The staff does a great job of keeping up a good appearance but the infrastructure is in very poor shape. Not unlike many parts of the city (fire, police, roads, etc.), many years of not facing up to the real cost of running a zoo have created a backlog of much needed repair and replacement. Furthermore there are the matters of educational facilities and staff facilities that have never been properly addressed.

Maybe the plan could recommend a top to bottom evaluation of the physical infrastructure (electrical, mechanical, structural, etc.) and provide cost and schedule estimates to bring the zoo up to current codes and standards. This evaluation should also specifically address worker safety. As you know the zoo just recently could have had a worker fatality. I am not sure what the accident investigation concluded but it is an example of where worker safety was inadequately addressed. Another example of a worker safety concern is passage throughout the zoo in winter. The three paths from the top of the zoo to the bottom have short but steep sections that become very icy. And at the bottom large sections become skating rinks. This concern is compounded by the fact that the keepers very seldom have their hands free. They are carrying food, enrichment items, equipment, laundry... which makes passage more treacherous.

If you have any questions or if I can provide clarification just let me know. As I mentioned I will try and provide additional more detailed comments later.

Best regards,

Bob  
Email sent 9/6/2016

Hi David,

Here are some additional comments on the **draft FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN**. I realize you are presenting the plan to the city council in a few hours but I feel these comments are worthy of consideration. Thanks again for the opportunity to review the document and appreciate your hard work.

## **Section I**

As mentioned in my previous message to you, here is the first example of what I believe creates an impression of the misplaced priorities of the plan.

“With a focused effort toward a common vision, IFZ staff and the community can more effectively partner to create an increasingly influential and dynamic zoo that is more financially viable, a more valuable educational and entertainment asset, has an increased impact on the local economy, and inspires active participation in creating a healthy future for wildlife.” Here finance is listed #1 and #4, education #2, entertainment #3 and finally at #5 is the primary purpose of the zoo.

The plan says that “Input from public, visitors, stakeholders, staff, volunteers, and city officials was the single most important factor in the development of this Five-Year Strategic Plan.” What other sources were considered and what did they contribute to the plan? For example other zoos, AZA, USDA, etc. How did the you get information from non-zoo goers, non-zoo supporters etc.?

The plan describes how input from the community was solicited. Since this effort contributed much to the plan: where are the survey results documented, how was the analysis performed, by whom and how were the conclusions drawn?

## **Section II**

This is a very interesting history but probably belongs more as an appendix than as a part of the main document. Here again, conservation is discussed after economics and education.

The comparison of local visitation to city population is misleading (81% of the Idaho Falls population). More information needs to be provided for that comparison to be meaningful: 1,000 people attending 20 times each is much different from 20,000 people attending once.

The section mentions several supporting studies and reports. A reference list needs to be generated with complete citation information.

## **Section III**

While the survey results list the purposes of the zoo in the following order: education, entertainment/recreation, and then conservation. This is example of where the public is not correct and further education is needed to assure greater understanding. The plan should focus on conservation then education then entertainment/recreation.

As mentioned before, the plan arrives at some very bold and precise conclusions based on the survey results. The details of this process need to be shared. For example the sidebar states: "The IFZ needs a philosophical, programmatic, and physical transformation from a wonderful, relaxing experience for visitors

to a dynamic, interactive, experience that has a significant impact.” This seems contradictory to “The strongest conclusion from all surveys and interviews was the extremely positive feelings that everyone has for IFZ and the experience that they have there.”

Similarly it is not clear how and why the sidebar TPZ By the Numbers were selected. As an example of the lack of clarity is the statement “Only 36% of the visitors gave the IFZ an “Excellent” ranking in educational value.” If 44% ranked educational value as “Very Good” this implied message would be totally different. I would recommend giving the complete results in a bar graph like [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) does on their product reviews.

The conclusion that IFZ needs to strengthen its Foundation fails to include the zoo infrastructure which is in real need of repair and replacement.

## **Area of Priority 1. Strengthen the Foundation**

As mentioned before this section should address more completely the physical infrastructure needs of the zoo. It seems the plan basically defers any discussion of the major needs to a IFZ Master Plan. There are still steps that could be taken as part of this strategic plan to facilitate the proper treatment in the master plan. As an example that I previously stated: Maybe the plan could recommend a top to bottom evaluation of the physical infrastructure (electrical, mechanical, structural, etc.) and provide cost and schedule estimates to bring the zoo up to current codes and standards. This evaluation should also specifically address worker safety.

With regards to the TPZS the CRC report (pages 53 and 54) discussed their concerns in some detail. These should be addressed.

## **Area of Priority 2. Improve Visitor Experience**

The recommendation of exploring the addition of an aquarium should not be undertaken until the needs of the existing zoo have been adequately identified and plans for their correction have been approved.

Do not understand the statement: The stage for animal shows for example, takes space that the zoo does not have.

## **Area of Priority 3. Conservation**

In the area of water conservation, the zoo should considered automating its watering system to mimic the city's P&R centrally controlled irrigation system. This was a CRC commission recommendation.

Before water reduction efforts are implemented, attention should be paid to possible unintended and undesirable side effects. For instance shutting off flow at night to an outside pool can increase algae buildup which necessitates additional chemical treatment, labor and more importantly worker safety risks.

## **Area of Priority 4. Broaden the Reach**

I guess I am not familiar with the use of the word "reach" in this context but I agree the zoo could do a better job of alerting potential visitors.

Didn't see any specific recommendation for addressing demographic expansion particularly to user groups like the Hispanic population. Data should be gathered to find out what groups are being underserved and then a plan to actively engage them developed.

With regards to expanding hours and possibly open year round, answers to questions like "should the zoo be open year round" without telling the respondents the potential consequences are not that helpful. And as I mentioned previously winter passage in the zoo can be very treacherous at times.

### **Area of Priority 5. Maintain the Current Atmosphere and Accessibility of the Zoo**

Not sure why this priority could not be incorporated into the previous priorities. For example Objective 2 deals with maintenance. This would fit nicely in **Area of Priority 1. Strengthen the Foundation.** Objective 2 could fit nicely in **Area of Priority 2. Improve Visitor Experience.**

### **Conclusion**

I agree the plan does seem to take many steps to increase the economic impact from the zoo. My concern is that the focus should be first and foremost on the care of our animal guests. They are the reason we have a zoo in the first place. If we just want an animal attraction to generate the greatest possible income, then Bear World should be our model. Similarly if the nonhuman infrastructure is not properly addressed in a timely manner then our animal guests are at risk, the workers are at unnecessary risk, and the economic efforts will fall short.



# APPENDIX I

## Romanian Fatal Tiger Attack

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2024/12/09/zoo-employee-tiger-romania/76859913007/>

## Tiger fatally attacks zoo employee while he was cleaning animal's cage, officials say



Natalie Neysa Alund  
USA TODAY

A zoo employee is dead after being fatally attacked by a tiger while he was cleaning the animal's cage, officials in Romania are reporting.

City officials posted on social media that the attack took place in the morning hours Monday in the city of Pitesti, a city in the southcentral region of Romania.

A preliminary investigation by police revealed the 52-year-old victim, an employee of Pitesti Zoo, entered the tiger's cage without complying with safety protocol and was fatally attacked, according to the release.



The employee had worked at the zoo since 2015, officials announced. It was the first such attack in 50 years at the zoo.

Officials said an internal investigation is underway.

**Mayor: Zoo activities suspended after employee fatally mauled by tiger**

The city's mayor, Cristian Gentea shared thoughts with the victim's family in a post on his Facebook page, adding that he ordered a pause on activities at the zoo while the investigation is carried out.





Tragedie la Grădina Zoologică Pitești

Witnesses told Romanian outlet Evenimentul Zilei the attack was extremely violent, and a criminal case for manslaughter has been opened by local police.

Zoo leaders and workers were deeply affected by the incident, officials wrote in the news release.