

Idaho Falls Zoo - None Dare Call it Safe!

A Volunteer's Experiences and Musings
about Management Failures and Fiascos
at the Idaho Falls Zoo

by

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THIS REPORT IS DEDICATED TO MY DEAR LION
FRIEND

KIMANI

WHO CHOSE NOT TO EAT ME!



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PREFACE

On June 9th last year, I found myself face to face with Kimani, the Idaho Falls zoo female lion!* I was inside the lion enclosure cleaning the exhibit of poop, bones, and any other debris or leftover enrichment items. This was my fourteenth year of volunteering at the zoo, over three thousand hours. Wasn't sure I was going to get one more hour. My watch recorded a 100 beats per minute spike, well above the maximum heart rate for an ancient one!

Why Kimani did not jump my bones I do not know. I like to think that Kimani recognized me, my voice or smell and thought of me as a friend not a threat. In due course I was able to slowly inch my way around the exhibit to the personnel doors and escape unharmed but not unfazed! Truly a miracle.

*Exhibit 1 is a composite photo simulating the start of the incident. Although the figure looks cartoonish there are a few salient points. My location is precise, taken from a previous photo. The lion/s are hillside poopers and that is a favorite spot. The golden shovel is a real shovel that was used in the previous photo. It was used in the groundbreaking ceremony for the Mountain America Center. The location also happens to be as far away from the personnel doors as possible. Not good. Lastly Kimani might look too large, but cameras do not photograph mass or strength. Kimani probably weighed over twice as much and was maybe 5 to 10 times stronger than I. So in some sense if one were to try and capture the disparity between the two parties she probably should be bigger!

Here is what I asked the zoo to do when I reported the incident to them 12 hours after it happened: "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.”

Here is what I asked the American Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and the United States Department of Agriculture Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA/APHIS) to do: “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.”

A dear friend asked me what outcome I wanted to get from the zoo out of this horrific event. I told her that I wanted to make sure that this type of event never happened again and that I wanted to leave the zoo a much safer place.

To that end, I thought I could accomplish those objectives by participating in the accident investigation, helping to determine the root cause/s, appropriate corrective actions and seeing the actions implemented properly. But that didn’t work out. Zoo management decided not to include me in any of the post incident activities and went as far as never even asking my thoughts and opinions on the accident and what should be done. Zoo management did reach out three times after the accident to see if I was doing okay. And I got invited to one briefing where

they talked vaguely about what they were doing and might do. At that meeting I expressed major concerns that their approach was flawed and they were the wrong people to do the work. For example, conducting the investigation themselves (just 3 people), no independence; that it was a worker safety issue that happened at the zoo, not just a zoo issue and that they needed qualified safety people involved.... But of course they continued on their merry way.

I then began to reach out to the mayor and exchanged a couple of thoughtful emails. My third and last email received no response. Maybe a case of nominative determinism. Maybe I should explain. The mayor's last name is Casper and when people do not respond to emails, texts, phone calls the kids these days call that "ghosting." At least Casper is a "friendly" ghost. These three emails are found in Appendix B.

I also approached the Post Register, preparing a guest editorial but they not only chose to not publish it but "ghosted" me when I left a phone message asking if they had even considered it. The reader can find the guest editorial in Appendix C.

Next I began to approach the city council, in particular the two zoo liaisons: Jim Francis and Michelle Ziel-Dingman. I also delivered two ~ 3 minutes public speeches to the City Council in August and September to express my concerns. These can be found in Appendix D. In the first speech I recommended the City Council add the incident to their agenda and have the Zoo explain their actions and answer questions. That did not happen. I also said that I would provide "a much more detailed evaluation of safety at the zoo as well as concerns and observations about animal welfare, the zoo management..."

This document is that promised evaluation.

This report was both easy to write and hard to write. Easy to write because I am describing actual events and observations and had plenty of material to work with. Hard to write because I had to select examples that were the most enlightening and while I wanted the report to be constructive it had to describe major failures that couldn't be placed in a good light.

At this time the reader might ask what qualifications does the author have? A brief description is provided in Exhibit 2.

It is important to acknowledge the assumptions and limitations of this report. 1) This report is based solely on my experiences at the zoo, not as a separate inquiry. I was not doing what Stephen Covey recommends: begin with the end in mind. 2) This is what I would call a Ramblin' Wreck document. It is made with the pieces and parts I had on hand. The pieces and parts being emails, photos, and recollections. 3) This document is what I call an umpire report. I have called it as I have seen it. I would also add that no one had a better, more frequent view, than I did: in the trenches every week, year round for over a decade. 4) I was at the zoo typically only 7% (~ 4 hours per week) of the available 7 day work week time. It would be unfair to multiply the concerns by 12 but it would be unwise not to consider that it would be some multiple thereof. 5) I spent that time mainly in one area of the zoo called Area 4. Area 4 has the fun fur animal friends: the Amur tiger, two Bactrian camels, two red pandas, 4 sloth bears, two servals, two fennec foxes, two snow leopards and two African lions. The exact numbers of animals varied through the years but those are typical. So again there would be some increase in concerns from the other zoo areas. 6) Because Area 4 is the only area with large mammal apex predators, the fossa notwithstanding, the concerns are magnified greatly because of the much greater consequences if things go wrong.

Throughout the report the reader may come across the zoo's words and deeds that might have them thinking things like: are you kidding me, no way, that's stupid, what were they thinking etc. To let the reader know they are not alone in such thoughts I have included a musical refrain at those places. That refrain is: DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM

INTRODUCTION

The original purpose of this report was to document the management failures that led to only a miracle preventing a mauling or death! and the subsequent failures in the accident follow-up. It soon became clear that it was an opportune time to expand the scope of this report to include management failures in select other key areas. As such the purpose became not only a critique of the lion near miss incident but also a broader and a more nuanced look at the overall management in several broad categories.

This report is structured to cover the near fatal lion incident first, then look at other safety-related failures at the zoo, then other management failures. More specifically, the document is broken into 8 sections with accompanying exhibits and appendices. The exhibits contain photos that add visual evidence to the report. The appendices provide more detailed supporting materials.

The first part will describe the management failures that led up to the actual incident. These failures, among possibly others, would have been identified during the independent accident investigation had one been done.

The second part will describe the management failures post-accident.

The third part will highlight some other safety-related zoo failures that support the premise that at the zoo, safety is not number 1 and the lion incidence was not a fluke.

The fourth part will describe management failures with respect to the welfare of our animal friends.

The fifth part will present other non-safety-related management failures - personnel, leadership, project management and planning.

The sixth part will describe the failures of management overseers: AZA, USDA/APHIS and the City of Idaho Falls.

The seventh part will provide some ideas and suggestions of how to proceed.

Lastly, an epilogue will provide some reflections.

Both the exhibits and appendices provide additional supporting material. The exhibits are primarily photos. The appendices provide much more detailed supporting materials: notifications, email threads, presentations, guest editorial, and three horrific news articles about lion and tiger attacks. This supplemental information is provided to document what information was provided to whom and when. Also to preemptively head off any claims that the material in the main body of the report was cherry-picked. Further, it will save subsequent reviewers, time and trouble, in locating this supporting material. Lastly, by being essentially a standalone document the material is preserved in case internet links are broken or emails deleted.

PART 1

MANAGEMENT FAILURES LEADING TO THE LION INCIDENT

There were five major management failures prior to the incident. Had the zoo management addressed any of the first three failures the incident would not have happened. Addressing the fourth failure would have delayed the inevitability of the incident but not prevented it. Addressing the fifth failure would not have prevented the incident but could have mitigated the consequences which could have been dire!

#1. Zoo management failed to properly identify, characterize and manage the risks posed by apex predators.* Because of this, the zoo has no idea just how safe the workers and the public are. There has been no systematic safety analysis performed.
DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM...

*Apex predator is the animal at the top of the food chain. They eat and don't get eaten. The cartoon in Exhibit 3 captures it very nicely from the lion point of view.

The root cause of the lion incidence was zoo management's failure to recognize and manage the extremely high risks associated with having apex predators in a public place. Summarily dismissing the lion near death experience as just human error caused by the keeper was incomplete, inaccurate and unprofessional.

My overarching concern is because of 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, disaster is inevitable. I would argue 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?!

This is not to say that one cannot have a zoo with apex predators in the middle of a town. It is saying you shouldn't have one in the middle of town if you do not understand the very real risks and manage them properly.

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. One exchange that I found especially disturbing was about safety standards. I kept pushing on what standards is the zoo meeting. When no one would ever produce an AZA safety standard the executive director even went so far to say the zoos couldn't have standards because they all different!
DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM...

In my guest editorial to the Post Register I made the comment that no one should ever tell zoo management that all bridges are different.

One specific example of failing to appreciate the risks associated with apex predators is in snow leopard land. The barriers to prevent the escape of the snow leopards from their exhibit are obviously the wire fencing but also two personnel access doors. For a couple of years or more, the inner spring-loaded personnel

door to the exhibit has a spring which frequently misbehaves. That is, it fails to close. It has been a simple fix to open the door a little farther and coax the spring so that it does not bind. By not fixing this spring, the zoo has cut the safety margin to the public in half! Furthermore, if the lion incident had happened in snow leopard land, this failure to close could have led to the victim being trapped between the two doors with the snow leopard!! The spring should have been replaced the first time it bound up!

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Another specific example of the lack of appreciation of the risks, it always amazed me that one keeper with one key could let any and/or all of the apex predators out of their enclosures with no alarms or preventive measures in place!

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Maybe I have watched too many Columbo episodes (a TV crime drama series aired in the late 1900s) but follow this scenario: There is more than one person with the one key to open all the apex predator doors: the curator, the relief keeper, the vet tech... It is protocol for the keeper to announce to all radio bearing staff when they are entering an apex predator exhibit. At this time one of the other key bearing parties could enter the building and let the apex predator out. "Katy bar the door!"

Furthermore, since there are no alarms or other controls, it could be reasonable to assume the keeper failed to lock the door and the perpetrator could get off scot free!

These examples just reinforce the importance of a systematic safety analysis, such as event trees and fault trees. These tools can be used to identify all potential risks which then can be eliminated or mitigated.

Basically the zoo is flying blind. And they want the public to trust them!

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This ignorance of the safety situation makes decisions on how to proceed problematic. You don't know where you are in the safety space and you don't know where you need to end up.

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#2. Failure to recognize the total and complete unreliability of administrative controls for high hazard/dangerous situations.

Even if the zoo did not know the baseline risk posed by the apex predators, there was no excuse for having a safety situation that had single points of failure that were totally dependent upon administrative controls for avoiding potentially catastrophic events. Administrative controls are near the bottom and the least reliable of any of the types of safety measures.

[https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/](https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/Hierarchy_of_Controls_02.01.23_form_508_2.pdf)

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There were no alarms, interlocks, redundancies, etc. to prevent or lessen the likelihood of an undesirable event.

DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM

Anyone even vaguely familiar with the ancient well known religious scriptures learns that even God found out that administrative controls are an inadequate safety measure against human error. As a reminder to the reader: the first administrative control can be found in Genesis 2:17 "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." And one also learns that in Genesis 3:11,12 "Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the

man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.” Needless to say God was not happy that his administrative controls were not followed! And who on God’s green earth would think that administrative controls were sufficient for them when they weren’t for the Deity?!

For those who are more literate than religious, you will be quite familiar with Alexander Pope’s famous quote from his 1711 poem *An Essay on Criticism*: “To err is human”. It sums up, in a way that even Strunk and White would be pleased, the innate human condition. The moral of the story is one must expect and plan for human error.

For those familiar with the area, they might recall the horrific accident that happened at the Idaho National Laboratory over 60 years ago, killing three people. In this case, there were only administrative controls in place to prevent a single control rod from initiating an uncontrollable prompt critical nuclear reaction. Power went from near zero to 20,000 MW in less than a second! Both the site and the nuclear industry learned from this tragedy and prohibited reactor designs that could go prompt critical with a single control rod. And for commercial reactor designs, it is not possible to go prompt critical with any number of control rods.

Finally, in safety analysis 101 one learns that while administrative controls can contribute to an effective hazard/risk management system, by themselves they have critical shortcomings (e.g. inattention, complacency, distraction).

In the case of the Idaho Falls Zoo, the Executive Director keeps saying the zoo had procedures in place and that should have been enough. From the above it is apparent that procedures are not sufficient. In all my years at the zoo, I never saw any animal keeper ever consult a procedure, ever ask “I wonder what the procedure would say?” or “the procedure needs changing or the

like.” Different keepers would do things differently, not majorly, but different. I would put those differences in what I would call the dish washer category. People have their own way of loading the dish washer but in the end the dishes are clean. Maybe the procedures are worded loosely enough to allow for minor changes. I don’t know. A cynic might suggest the procedures were more like show pieces, to pull out when guests (such as inspectors) arrive.

One thing the zoo could also have done, even if they were not following detailed procedures, was create checklists. Checklists have been shown to reduce the human error dramatically in such complex and dangerous situations as fighter pilots and surgeons. Had there been a checklist for the keeper to follow it is quite possible the lion incident would have never happened.

#3 Failure to learn from past incidents at the zoo and other zoos

Case in point, there have been at least two other incidents at the Idaho Falls Zoo that I am aware of, that 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 unlocked and unattended. Had the keeper not checked the exhibit before letting the tiger out, the tiger could have had access to the public spaces of the zoo. While unlikely, member/s of the public could have entered the exhibit and if the keeper did not check could have let the tiger out and a horrific accident could have happened, I was not privy to what the details were, what notifications, if any, were made to the AZA or USDA/APHIS, or what investigation was done. The only corrective action I am aware of is the keeper received some time off. There are several

obvious changes that should have been made. One obvious recommendation would have been to have positive indication in the tiger building that the personnel doors were unlocked.

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The second incident happened about two or three years ago, and involved the serval exhibit and is almost identical to the June 9th incident. Servals are medium-sized wild cats that the zoo has classified as potentially dangerous animals. 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! I alerted the keeper and we quickly exited the exhibit. Not nearly as unnerving as the lion, since they weigh 10 to 20 times less, are about twice the size of a house cat and Bahati was at one time an ambassador animal and as such was trained to engage with the public. The serval exhibit is separated from the serval building by a tunnel with shift doors on either side. So the keeper failed to close even one of the two doors. Again I do not know what, if any, notifications were made to the AZA or USDA/APHIS, or what if any follow up investigation was conducted. I am not aware of any correction action. Here again, changes should have been made as well as the observation of what if it had happened at an apex predator facility.

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One can only speculate on how many other near misses there have been. I was only there about 4 hours a week. But during this time there's been a near miss frequency of about once every two years these last 6 years. Way too frequent!!

Furthermore, the zoo could have learned from the many big cat incidents captured in databases from the PETA (<https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/BigCatIncidentList.pdf>)

and Born Free USA (<https://www.bornfreeusa.org/exotic-incidents-database/>). I am not familiar with what the AZA has, but they should have the largest and best database on zoo incidents.
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#4 Failure to assign a qualified, experienced person to the apex predator keeper position

Zoo management gave the keys to the carnivore castle to a young, brand new employee with NO zoo experience and very limited training.

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The keeper job is not complex, but because of the inadequacy of the design with no engineered safety features, it is critical that the keeper is extremely conscientious, not easily distracted and always follows the rules completely. There is no margin of error. This type of requisite behavior is not usually covered in recruiting or standard training programs. You have to make sure you are training the right person with the right cognitive skills. You don't want someone that even jaywalks or colors outside the lines.

Of note, the employee did not hire himself, did not train himself, did not decide when he had satisfactorily completed the training and did not assign himself to the most critical position at the zoo. He definitely was the direct cause of the incident but by no means was he the only one at fault. The ultimate responsibility falls squarely on the shoulders of the executive director of the zoo.

#5 Failure to staff the emergency response capability

I was told by the Parks and Recreation Department Director that there were four zoo people that were "qualified" to use lethal force (a rifle) to mitigate the consequences of an animal

encounter of the most horrible kind. However, on the day of the lion incident none were at work!

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A tragic example of having a emergency response failure happened in a North Carolina zoo where a 22 year-old intern was fatally mauled and drug around the enclosure by her neck by a male lion. The zoo was cited by the state Occupational Safety and Health Division. Appendix E provides more information.

This also raises the question as to just how “qualified” are those zoo people? I am familiar with many of the zoo people and none of them strike me as gun people much less people that could shoot accurately in a time of utter panic. That takes a lot of training, continuously and frequently. Case in point, the tiger attack at the Boise Zoo had trained police men, people who carry guns for a living, accidentally shooting the victim. It took the victim far longer to recover from the gun shot wound than the tiger wounds. See Appendix 4 Boise Zoo Tiger Attack.

PART 2

MANAGEMENT FAILURES AFTER THE NEAR FATAL LION INCIDENT

If I had the skills of an editorial cartoonist, I would draw a zoo manager getting in a Hubris mobile, on Incompetent Lane, headed for Cover Your Ass Boulevard with Scot Free Land in the distance!

I am not privy to exactly what steps zoo management took immediately after I reported the incident to them. What should have happened, after taking some immediate steps to assure the

apex predators were secure and that the keys were taken from the keeper involved in the incident, notifications should have been made not only to the AZA and the USDA/APHIS but also to the staff, volunteers and the public. I know that a week later at least one of the staff members had not heard of the incident. I know that the first time the volunteers were told about the incident was almost a month later. And even in that case, only the limited number of volunteers who were present at the meeting that day, the day before the 4th of July, were told. I don't know if the public/media were ever told directly e.g. press release. I do know that after the press and TV media contacted zoo management they did respond.
DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM

With regards to public disclosure, 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 is no way to alert other facilities who might have similar situations. This behavior does not belong in a city administration that believes in and supports open and transparent governance.
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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.

The next major step would be to conduct an independent investigation. Zoo management refused to do such even though there are many textbook reasons 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.

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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. I cited examples in Part 1 #3: Failure to learn from past incidents.

As you might recall, a candidate running for president survived an assassination attempt last summer. I will point out that some of

the first words the President spoke to the American public about the attempt were: “I have ordered an **independent review** of the national security measures in place at Trump’s rally and promise to **release the results of that investigation publicly.**” - NPR. Emphasis mine.

Can you imagine the outrage if the Secret Service said they would conduct their own investigation! And only later would they hand pick some reviewers.

Nonetheless, the zoo continued on with their “faux” independent process: having the person that was responsible for the event lead the investigation, having only two other zoo staff members on the committee, deciding what the investigation should entail, how it should be conducted, presenting the information that they wanted to present, and then submitting to a few handpicked reviewers for their blessing.

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 and what corrective actions are taken. I find it interesting that the AZA evidently does not have a accident investigation procedure or why didn’t the zoo choose to use it.
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With regards to the “independent” reviewers I was told two senior people from the Boise zoo were coming and separately the head of Idaho Zoo and was asked if I would like to talk to them. 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 zoo director added that they were

not being paid. Go figure. He did go on to say a final reviewer would have a scope of work and a deliverable.

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All too cavalier! The processes should be structured, systematic and open to the public.

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 helped 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.

DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM

I also got a chance to talk to one of the founders of GRAZE (Growing Resiliency for Aquarium and Zoo Employees - Bringing mental health support to the zoo and aquarium industry). An interesting company. The company was formed by the veterinarian technician whose best friend got eaten by a tiger at her zoo. They tout a combined 30 years of experience (not a lot) in the zoo industry. Also I had to drill down on their web site to find safety analysis as a support service they provide. My conclusion is that they were a one-trick pony peddling the 2 lock / 2 key process that they claimed they developed as a result of their fatal encounter. I did look at a YouTube video of a presentation they gave at a zoo conference about the 2 lock / 2 key process. I would have to know more than what was presented to provide an opinion on its efficacy. The real issue is

someone proposing a solution without a real understanding of the safety posture of the Idaho Falls Zoo. One comment I found disturbing was the presenter kind of went out of her way to say they didn't get any citations from the accident! How awful! Your best friend is killed and you are happy you got no citations.
DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM

I also pointed out the vast majority of time the Idaho Falls Zoo only had one person at a time in the apex predator areas and wouldn't apply with only one person. I also told her I would suggest adding engineered safety features instead.

It is obvious that the accident investigation was perfunctory. The Idaho Falls Zoo management found their scapegoat (the new young employee) and were done with the investigation.
DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM

I guess the final report is yet to be released. I did get a 4 page "Summary of Lioness Incident for Commission" undated. It made a quick statement that "the incident was the result of human error." The report then proceeded to describe the actions and steps they had taken to date. There was no discussion on why those actions were taken, what other actions were considered, how much safety improvement was achieved, etc. Definitely a case of what I call "prune management!" This is when you don't really know what you are doing. So you do a couple of things and hope for the best. Kinda like prunes, is three enough, is six too many!
DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM

PART 3

OTHER MANAGEMENT SAFETY FAILURES

Sloth bear pool

Probably close to 6 to 8 years ago another near death accident happened at the zoo. The sloth bear keeper slipped and hit the back of her head entering the sloth bear cement pond, as Granny Clampett from the Beverly Hillbillies would call it. Falls like that have frequently resulted in death. I have no idea if it was reported or not or to whom. I also do not know if an accident investigation was conducted. But I do know that nothing was done to remedy the hazardous condition. No steps, ladder, or railings were added. There is still no safe way to enter or exit the pool.

DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM

This is a classic example of not including safety as a criterion during the initial design. It is obvious if you have a water feature such as a pool in an exhibit it will need to be cleaned, frequently, in the case of sloth bears. As such, there should have been a design specification for safely entering and leaving the pool. And if they were really paying attention, there should have been a specification to minimize the need for cleaning. This would have resulted in maybe a rim around the perimeter of the pool and possibly some sort of buffer area to minimize mud and debris entering the pool.

There should have been an accident investigation and an outcome of that investigation should have required a review of all water features at the zoo for safety and necessary changes made. I know of none. Case in point: consider the two penguin pools inside and outside. Years ago, I had the opportunity to clean the outside pool. It wasn't obvious how to enter the pool much less get out. The technique was to get an extension ladder and there were two small indentations in the bottom of the pool for the legs of an extension ladder to nest in. I was told if I felt

uneasy I could tie the ladder off with a rope!
DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM

Years later I had the opportunity to clean the indoor penguin pool. Here too it was not obvious if there was a preferred route to climb down the rock wall. Not as ambitious as Chicken-Out Ridge on Mount Borah but not the safest way to enter particularly with high top rubber boots. Again there should have been a design specification for safely entering and exiting the pool.

Snow and Ice - The winter of 2022, 2023 I had to write three “pointed” emails to zoo management about the extremely hazardous snow and ice conditions our keeper friends faced to try to get a proper response. Snow and ice have been an ever present winter hazard and policies and practices should have already been in place. Exhibit 4 has a couple of photos showing the extreme hazardous conditions take a week apart.

If one is interested in the particulars, the emails and responses can be found in Appendix 5. The main takeaway is that an effective safety program is proactive not reactive. You do not wait until there is a problem before doing anything. Can you imagine if the airport waited until an airplane slid off the run way before plowing? Another takeaway, very evident from the photos in Exhibit 4, is by waiting, the problem will persist for a loooong time.

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Camel yard

In July of last year after the untimely death of Humphrey, the baby camel, I wrote to zoo management to formerly complain about the mine field of potholes in the camel exhibit. I had mentioned this problem several times over the previous months to the keeper friends. I remember one time on a especially muddy morning, the keeper friend said if I didn’t feel save, I didn’t have to go out there. I responded that I knew that but

why didn't the zoo just fill the holes so everyone would be safer!
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Exhibit 6 has two photos showing the camel yard potholes.

I went on in the email to say that in addition to filling, grading and rolling the area it would be a good time to consider sodding the problem area. It would make the area less muddy and pothole resistant. Not to mention, more camel friendly. :). A year later nothing had been done to remedy the yard.

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Worker Safety

In Exhibit 5, I show a picture of a worker trying to open a shift door in the sloth bear building. Since a picture is worth a 1000 words I will let it speak for itself. One other significant point is the picture of this particular configuration was taken after facility maintenance had fixed the troublesome gate!

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I will add that is not the first and only time that I have seen keeper friends put themselves in precarious positions to accomplish their tasks. I have even seen a keeper friend pull themselves up the side of a building to try and open a shift door. Had the cable broke or slipped it could have been ugly. There is definitely a "Git R Done" mentality at the zoo, not always safety first.

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PART 4

ANIMAL WELFARE MANAGEMENT FAILURES

I believe Animal Welfare is the second major pillar of a zoo, standing right next to Safety. Here are several examples of where the zoo has failed to meet the highest standards of animal welfare.

The two most egregious examples are the fossa and the Aldabra tortoises.

The fossa is arguably the most exotic animal at the zoo that the public has yet to see. He has been confined in the zoo hospital since at least 2019. The fossa resembles a cat and is the apex predator endemic to Madagascar. He has claws like a cat, a tail like a monkey and is well designed for an arboreal habitat. Not a concrete floored hospital cell block.

When I asked the Executive Director about the fossa and his present condition I got the following responses: we never asked for him; he is better off than he was; the public can't miss him if they don't know he is there, etc. These are sad and unprofessional responses.

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Even if the zoo is fulfilling his dietary needs and he is out of the wind and rain it is not a quality of life habitat. I understand he has a place in the new Hamilton Building exhibit whenever it opens but other accommodations should have been made in the weeks after his arrival not years! Every animal keeper I talked to has agreed.

Similarly the Aldabra tortoises's winter habitat is too cramped. I was told that even the last AZA evaluation about five years ago identified the accommodations as needing improvement. Here we are six years later and nothing has changed. Like the fossa, I understand the new Hamilton Building exhibit will be their new winter quarters. Ironically and sadly one of the longest living animals died awaiting the completion of his winter habitat.

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Every animal keeper I talked to agreed that other accommodations should have been made in the interim.

With regards to veterinary care, there have been several premature and unexplained deaths to our animal friends: two young zebras, one young red panda (Marvin), one young serval (Zuri), and a young camel (Humphrey). Humphrey died from a broken leg which I believe was most likely caused by one of the many large potholes in the camel exhibit that went unfilled. I do know that if you had a prized foal in thoroughbred country he would have never been subjected to a potholed field! The official zoo response was that an investigation was conducted and there was nothing in the exhibit that could have caused the accident. I strongly disagree. I would guess that a forensic review of the X-ray of the broken leg could have distinguished a break from a pothole vs being stepped on by his Mom which was the possible alternative theory the zoo posited,.

By my definition, one criterion of failure is if animals die in captivity sooner than they would in the wild.

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There was also an incident of misdiagnosing the sex of a baby sloth bear cub (Jaeger). Not the greatest problem but embarrassing when the zoo prepared to ship the young sloth bear away a year later and come to find out he was a she and the shipment had to be cancelled and a new zoo home found.

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Here is an example of where animal welfare at the zoo was lessened by Funland. In the spring of 2023 there was a vicious storm that brought down many tree branches, some quite large. Fortunately only one exhibit was severely damaged; the red-

crowned crane exhibit. The netting had collapsed and support posts damaged. The executive director told the Parks and Recreation Commissioners at their monthly meeting the morning after the storm that the cranes would be back on exhibit that afternoon! I was there that morning and there was no way the exhibit would be repaired in one afternoon. So how long did it take? One month! All this time, the red-crowned cranes were confined in their small windowless wooden shed. When I asked the staff why it was taking so long, they said they were pulled off to get Funland ready to open in one month. If animal welfare was at the top where it should have been, the red-crowned cranes would have been back in their exhibit in a couple of days not a month.

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Here are a couple of more examples of where the animal welfare could have easily been improved.

For years there were three or so small random patches of bamboo that the keepers and volunteers would cut a few sprigs each time they went in to clean the red panda exhibit. The red pandas really like the bamboo. But the harsh winter a couple of years ago decimated the patches. I suggested that the zoo create a separate place dedicated to growing the bamboo. I even tried to get the Parks department horticulturist interested in helping the zoo grow a more sustainable supply of bamboo. But the efforts went nowhere. To provide a better quality of life for the red pandas the zoo should establish a reliable source of bamboo. It is evident from the beautiful city parks the Parks Department has a skilled horticultural workforce.

The zoo is old and most every exhibit could benefit from an upgrade. As an example, the serval building is just a small uninsulated concrete block structure. It has a wall heater but in the winter it is necessary to add another portable space heater to

keep the temperature warm enough for the serval friend. But on the coldest days the water bowl will have a layer of ice on the top.

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Although a new building should be built, the zoo should at least insulate the existing building to minimize the likelihood of needing to thaw out a frozen serval in case the power goes out for a few hours.

Another exhibit that could benefit from an upgrade is the camel exhibit. But in the meantime the zoo should provide chewing opportunities for the camels in the runways from the barn to the exhibit. In the center of the exhibit there is a large wood pile where the camels spend a lot of time chewing on the big branches. But when the camel/s are confined to the barn and runways there are no chewing opportunities, so they will chew on the iron railings. This can't be good for them. One other simple change that should be made is to remove the small length of chain that is used to close the swinging gate between the two runways. I have found it on the ground and the camels could have ingested it.

PART 5

OTHER MANAGEMENT FAILURES - leadership, personnel, project management, planning

Leadership - In addition to the leadership failures in addressing the lion incident and safety in general, three specific areas of

failed leadership are: personal accountability, communication and competence.

The unwillingness of the Executive Director to take any responsibility for the zoo's failure to protect the staff from the apex predators is beyond the pale. 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!

Any leader that takes a no fault position when their prime mission has failed is either dumb, dishonest or delusional. This is hardly a good example for the employees.

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The second area of concern is communication. Although the Executive Director loves to talk, it is hard to get any specific information. I would describe his communication as vague, verbose, vain and averse to answering questions directly.

Sometimes after talking with the Executive Director I felt my time would have been better spent trying to put a sweater on an eight pound rainbow trout.

This becomes harmful though when it comes to matters of safety. Details matter, timing matters, the audience matters. As I said to the Post Register: Safety dies in darkness.

As I said previously, the public should have been informed on Monday the day after the accident, all the staff including the volunteers and of course the AZA and the USDA/APHIS.

If people don't know about it, they can't learn from it. And then history repeats itself and not in a good way.

Here is a direct quote from a volunteer about the Executive Director's talk to the Volunteers almost a month after the incident: "David was there and talked about it but no names were mentioned and didn't get into detail - just basically what happened. No one pressed him for names or details - probably because they knew he wouldn't give out any of that information."

Lastly competence. Although leader competence should be first. The Executive Director is not suited for the job: Lack of zoo experience; no real knowledge of safety (wouldn't know a fault tree if he fell out of it); unwillingness to acknowledge shortcomings, misguided priorities (zoo expansion over taking care of existing facilities) and appearance over substance (accreditation is more important than creating a safe, healthy and productive work environment).
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Personnel - With respect to personnel management, I will make the following observation:

From Spring of 2022 to early summer 2024 the zoo lost at least the following personnel:

1 Animal Care Supervisor

2 Area 4 Keepers
2 Area 3/4 Relief Keepers
1 Animal Keeper
1 Animal Keeper Assistant
1 Facilities Manager
1 Facilities Maintenance Specialist
1 Guest Services Manager
1 Veterinarian
1 Public Engagement Curator

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12

I say at least because I do not have access to the personnel records. But in any case it is a horrible record.

Essentially a little more than half of the people in the last two years have left!

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All aspects of the zoo are compromised with this inexplicable turnover! So much for teamwork, camaraderie and zoo specific knowledge.

One further observation: When I first started volunteering at the zoo, and when there was a new hire, they published a nice profile of the employee. Their first and last names, a picture, their schooling, their previous employment history and any special interests. Two years ago, the only notice was an entry on the Idaho Falls Zoo Staff List in the myImpactPage.com that gave their first and last name, sometimes a picture, their new position, a one line answer to the best part of the job question and a Fantastic Fact. This is some inane comment. For instance, for the Executive Director it is: "David once arm-wrestled a yeti for a grilled cheese sandwich. He says the cheddar was delicious." Fast forward to the present, they don't even list the last name.
DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM...DUM

Sure makes someone feel welcome (not) and makes it difficult to interact with the new staff. I think it would be fruitful to send each of the former employees a \$25 gift card and a self addressed plain envelope and ask them to say why they really left and what might have made them stay. They need not provide their names.

Planning - With respect to planning, I asked the Parks and Recreation Director's Office if I could get a copy of the latest zoo strategic plan. I was aware and had reviewed an August 2016 Five Year Strategic Plan. I was told by the Parks and Recreation Director's Office that "there is no official zoo plan."
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The 2016 plan was filled with pretty pictures and promising ideas. However I looked and there was no schedule! One criteria of a plan is that it has a schedule. No schedule, no plan. I asked the Executive Director about the schedule. he responded that it was a five year schedule. I told him that was a duration not a schedule!

So maybe it was a to-do list. But then there was no budget on resource requirements. So it is not even a to-do list but maybe a wish list. Hardly something anyone could work to.
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I stressed two areas in particular that were inadequately addressed: worker safety and the infrastructure. Specifically, "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."

Here was my summary paragraph: "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.”

Detailed comments are provided in Appendix 7.

Project management - For project management this discussion will focus on the renovation of the Hamilton building. I think it has been going on for close to six years now. For years I would ask when it was going to be finished. I never got an answer. Only vague, non-responsive comments on how hard they are working and how much they had gotten done. I asked to see a Gantt chart or equivalent but never saw anything resembling project management. The last time I asked which was a year or two ago, the director finally said if he gave me a date I would hold it against him!
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The Executive Director seems to be averse to schedules in general. I told him the zoo is not like your basement where you can take as long as you want. Costs go up, public is denied experiences, animals are in less desirable conditions and so on. I overheard him say “no one will care in fifty years if Heritage park is a year or two late.”

Actually there is a current ongoing example. The original accident investigation was to be completed in early September, then it was October, then it was first part of December and the last word I heard was that it would be the third week of January!
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PART 6

FAILURE OF MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT

Although the main purpose of this report is to point out the failures of the zoo management, it is important to identify those parties that have contributed to the failures by not providing timely and thorough reviews and oversight.

I will begin by questioning the adequacy of the AZA accreditation process with regards to the safety of housing apex predators based on 8 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? Who oversees the AZA and what assurance is there that their accreditation assures adequate safety measures are in place?

When it comes to safety, instead of priding themselves on privacy and confidentiality they should focus on openness and collaboration!

A couple of data points can be found from the bornfreeusa.org. Exotic Incidents Database

It reveals 46 Big Cat incidents at AZA accredited zoos from 1990 to present resulting in human injury. And 5 Big Cat incidents at AZA accredited zoos from 1990 to present resulting in human deaths. A death every 7 years is not an effective safety record.

#6 I will also point out this investigative report:

<https://undark.org/2023/05/10/a-zoo-association-devoted-to-science-but-plagued-by-scandal/>

An excerpt: “But background interviews, court documents, text messages, and emails uncovered as part of the lawsuit and obtained by Undark offer an unusually public glimpse into the secretive world of American zoos. They also depict the AZA as an organization where structural dysfunction reaches well beyond a single case of alleged harassment, and where unchecked impunity seems to protect people at the top while driving others out. Among other things, critics say, this is hampering the important scientific and conservation work that the AZA itself claims to champion.”

#7. I also find it a little suspicious that the head of the AZA used to be head of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. I am sure there would be no cronyism or suspect behavior.

#8. Lastly how on earth can a zoo that could have killed someone still keep their accreditation?! At the very least, the accreditation should have been suspended until an independent review had been conducted, root causes identified and necessary corrective actions taken.

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With respect to the USDA/APHIS:

“The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service is an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture based in Riverdale, Maryland responsible for protecting animal health, animal welfare, and plant health.” As far as I can gather from a quick review, is that their primary function is to enforce the Animal Welfare Act. I looked at a copy of the Act and did a word search for worker safety in the index and found no entries. Likewise I got no entries for safety? I just get the impression that worker safety is not high on their list if at all. Not in their title so...

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I did unearth a study about Public Barriers at Dangerous Animal Exhibits but it did not address the types of daily activities that led to the lion incident.

I did get a copy of their latest yearly inspection report dated February 13, 2024. I was looking to see what they said about the Aldabra tortoises and their winter accommodations. Guess what? The report only had one line “No non-compliant items were identified during this Pre-License Inspection.” The inspection list identified 87 species, 225 animals but alas no

Aldabra tortoises. It would be interesting to know why our Aldabra friends were not included.
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Regarding City oversight which would include both the Parks and Recreation Department as well as the Mayoral office, I am not aware of what they have done regarding oversight of the zoo operations pertaining to safety and animal welfare. I know they are quite interested in the financial side and attendance numbers.

Even not knowing what they did, it is fair to say it wasn't enough. To have many of the aforementioned issues exist for years is unacceptable. I get that if you are accredited by the AZA, the USDA/APHIS renews your operating permit, there are no major incidents and the Executive Director only spews good tidings, it is easy to get complacent and focus on other matters. However that doesn't excuse the fact that the City is ultimately responsible for the safety of the zoo, its staff and the public.
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All of the above begs the question, why are zoos not under the jurisdiction of the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA)? Because if nothing else, these apex predator incidents are workplace safety incidents that just took place at a zoo.

I think that zoos, since most every one likes animals, have 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. (20 big cats escaped and ultimately 18 were killed.)
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PART 7

AND NOW WHAT

It should be a clarion call to the city of Idaho Falls that the Idaho Falls Zoo is being poorly managed, so poorly in fact, that only a miracle prevented a mauling or death! A change is overdue.

This section could be longer than the rest of the report so I will limit it to a brief discussion of three possible paths for the lion incident and then touch briefly on a few remaining topics.

Lion incident

- 1) As with any hazardous situation, the first question a safety analyst would ask is: can we eliminate the hazard. A good example is the Hindenburg airship where they substituted an inert gas, helium, for the highly flammable hydrogen. Sadly it was a little late for the 36 victims. In the zoo's case, they have done so, albeit maybe unwittingly, in what I call the pet shop, they call it the habitat. These critters are the ones that go on field trips and show and tell at the zoo. Here they have a nonpoisonous king snake instead of a venomous king cobra. The safety concerns drop off dramatically. In the case of the apex predators, I would ask that the City of Idaho Falls to 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 and the mayor, 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. A straightforward solution would be to replace the snow leopard with ibexes, the lions with wildebeests and tiger with wild boars. Basically substituting the predators for the prey.

2) Do what the zoo is doing now. Maintain the status quo as much as possible. Do the absolute bare minimum, add a few token administrative controls and pray that events like this don't happen again. In this case, they could modify the Que sera song as their 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

3) The zoo should take this opportunity as the gift that it is! Metaphorically speaking the zoo got away with murder! Only a miracle stood in the way. So far the zoo has only bolloxed up the process and as such the present efforts have been wrongheaded, misguided and most likely if not inadequate not optimized. As an example by rushing to make corrective actions without a proper

investigation, and without knowing the current safety situation of the facility they have drawn attention away from what really should be done.

Establish an independent review of the accident to make sure that the root cause/s have been properly identified. Be sure to include appropriate expertise: workplace safety (OSHA), previous accident investigation experience, risk analysis, human factors, etc.

At the same time, determine the baseline apex predator safety of the Idaho Falls Zoo. Conduct a systematic safety analysis e.g. develop event trees and fault trees using accident data bases and other possible incidents. In a former life, there were people called The What If police to identify those other possible incidents. Fortunately the zoo is a simple system so the analysis should be straightforward.

Based on the results of these two previous efforts, convene a corrective action committee. Develop possible mitigative measures and conduct a tradeoff analysis to determine the best set of safety measures: measures that increase the safety the most. Focus on engineered safety features not administrative controls. There have been many advances in wireless sensors, cameras, alarms, interlocks, tracking devices and the like.

It is now time to address: 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 the zoo. I don’t believe the city has established

an acceptable level of risk for either the worker or public from the presence of apex predators at the zoo. So what level of safety is needed to be met is not known.

So what should the zoo do? The present strategy is to count on the AZA accreditation and the USDA/APHIS permit 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. Furthermore and more importantly we know that AZA accreditation is not adequate or the zoo wouldn't have had the near miss incident! Not to mention all the other accredited zoos that have had accidents involving apex predators.

One approach would be to have the City Council review the mitigative safety measures tradeoff study and decide what level they believe is acceptable. The City Councilors are the public's representatives.

With regards to general safety, obviously there are many existing programs to help improve a substandard program. A point I would make. Management should never miss an opportunity to demonstrate that Safety is #1. They could do this by encouraging the staff to identify unsafe acts or conditions. Safety needs to be proactive, not reactive. I would consider giving \$25 gift cards to staff identifying unsafe acts or conditions. It is amazing what one can see if one is looking. Then management should address problems as soon as they are identified.

With regards to animal welfare, like safety, one needs to constantly look for ways to improve the quality of life for the animal guests. I would suggest a standard somewhere between a pet shop and what you would do for your own pet.

One does have to draw the line at sleeping with the animal guests. :)

With regards to planning, the Mayor's Citizen's Review Committee recommended back in 2015 that there needs to be a plan to refurbish and replace existing facilities, structures and utilities including animal enclosures and exhibits. This was especially important since the zoo was already old. Sadly ten years has passed. If even a 20 year plan had been implemented the zoo would be half way done. The Strategic Plan should be redone and implemented to address these needs.

EPILOGUE

This has been quite the experience. I haven't had an uninterrupted night's sleep since June 8, 2024. I find it particularly infuriating that the Idaho Falls Zoo has been so recalcitrant to do the right thing. I feel like with this report I am putting a message in a bottle and hoping it lands on a friendly shore that will make this zoo and all zoos better.

The big irony - the keeper gets fired, the lion gets euthanized, the victim gets traumatized and Mr. Root Cause gets a raise! Now you ask why!?

I can't cure malaria like Bill Gates or Guinea worm like Jimmy Carter but just maybe, if there was proper independent safety regulation of zoos, then deaths and injuries from apex predators could approach zero. In the interim maybe at the very least the Idaho Falls Zoo could establish a precedence for how to manage the risk from apex predators. Draft a standard which would

include items like: conduct a site specific safety analysis, require engineered safety features for all single points of failure, require alarms for misplaced apex predators, take advantage of the latest in wireless sensors, cameras, tracking devices, and software to overcome the inevitable human error! And then share this success story with the entire zoo community!

The city owes a lot of its prosperity to safety. The stellar safety record for the Navy Nuclear Program and the proper response to the tragic SL-1 accident and subsequent exemplary safety record since for the Idaho National Laboratory has brought much work and many people to the area. The zoo could be the next example of safety first!

Sadly while finishing up this report, a USA news article told the story of a fatal zoo keeper accident in Romania. A tiger violently attacked a 10 year veteran employee while he was cleaning the exhibit. The preliminary investigation said the cause was failure to comply with safety protocol.

This reinforces the need to institute proper safety measures which are not solely dependent on administrative controls immediately worldwide!

I am left with three editorial cartoons, if I were capable of such, that would capture my overall view of the zoo.

For those familiar with the classic movie Animal House there was a scene when Otter puts his arm around Flounder and says Flounder, you can't spend your whole life worrying about your mistakes! You f***ed up. You trusted us!

The editorial cartoon would show zoo management as Otter with its arm around the grieving public with an arm ripped off. There would be a pool of blood along side would be the arm in the

mouth of a lion with a caption that said You f***ed up. You trusted us!

The second editorial cartoon would be that of a carnival barker on an old rickety ship labeled zoo, in troubled waters, screaming “the zoo did nothing wrong” and “the zoo is the best little zoo in the west” as it heads towards a iceberg labeled safety.

The third editorial cartoon would be that of a three legged milking stool labeled Idaho Falls Zoo with the three legs labeled financial, safety and animal welfare teetering on the edge of a cliff with the financial leg 18 inches long, animal welfare leg 15 inches long and the safety leg just 12 inches.

Lady Gaga’s latest song *Die with a Smile* has a lyric “Nobody’s promised tomorrow.” It should be zoo’s mission to do what it takes so they can promise that they won’t be the one that proves that statement true!

