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OFFER TO TAKE IN *ELEPHANTS* SPURS DISPUTE WITH ZOO GROUP, ACTIVISTS

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THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Two aging *elephants* have put Columbus in the middle of a bitter battle between the American Zoological Association and some animal activists.

The dispute involves the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium's offer two weeks ago to provide a new home for Wanda and Winky, two Asian pachyderms now residing at the Detroit Zoo. The Columbus zoo already has five Asian *elephants*, including a male calf born on April 16.

The Michigan zoo is closing its *elephant* exhibit and wants to find a place where its *elephants* can spend their sunset years. Wanda, 46, suffers from arthritis, and Winky, 51, suffers from chronic hoof ailments.

The zoological association, which helps oversee the management of zoo animals, on Sept. 2 recommended that the *elephants* go to Columbus.

Earlier this month, the zoological association lauded Columbus' *elephant* facilities and predicted the transfer would occur by early next month.

But Ron Kagan, director of the Detroit Zoo, balked at the idea.

Kagan on Monday told Gerald Borin, director of the Columbus zoo, he wants the elderly beasts to be sent to an *elephant* sanctuary in a warmer climate where Wanda and Winky will have more room to roam.

"Columbus has a terrific zoo and staff," Kagan said. "It's just that these two *elephants* are old and ailing."

The dispute heated up when In Defense of Animals, a national animal-advocacy group, yesterday criticized the zoological association's recommendation.

"It is abundantly clear that the AZA decision is not in the best interests of Winky and Wanda," the In Defense of Animals release said. "The AZA's minimum standards for space are coming under attack by animal advocates as well as some in the zoo industry."

The hard surfaces at most zoos often cause leg and hoof problems for *elephants*, according to In Defense of Animals. The Columbus zoo provides two acres of outdoor space and one acre of indoor space, the group added. "This is sure to affect their health," In Defense of Animals said.

Elliot Katz, a California veterinarian and executive director of In Defense of Animals, added, "It's a really tragic situation. The zoo industry doesn't like the idea of a growing segment of the population that wants to see better treatment of captive animals, especially as they get older."

Jane Ballentine, a spokeswoman for the zoological association, characterized Katz's organization as extremist. "They believe no animals belong in captivity. They always use emotional and guilt-ridden words."

Kagan is considering sending Wanda and Winky to a 2,700-acre sanctuary in the mountains south of Nashville, Tenn. It specializes in caring for aging and ailing *elephants*.

Carol Buckley, head of the sanctuary, said *elephants* are allowed to roam at her facility.

Ballentine said the Tennessee facility is not certified by the zoological association and does not participate in its animal conservation program.

To obtain certification, a facility must meet rigid standards for animal care and safety,

she said.

Buckley characterized Ballentine's group as "nothing more than a zoo club." She has never sought AZA certification, she said, because "We want *elephants* to be *elephants*. We're not interested in the public viewing them."

Her facility is sanctioned by the Association of Sanctuaries.

Borin says he's caught in a dispute he doesn't want to be in.

"We just made the offer. If they want to send the *elephants* here, that's fine. It's up to them," he said of the Detroit Zoo and the zoological association.

Borin was a bit irked by In Defense of Animal's criticism of the Columbus zoo. "I don't think they should make a blanket statement when they haven't visited our zoo and don't know our staff," Borin said.

A zoological association committee will review the recommendation to send Wanda and Winky to Columbus, Ballentine said. A decision should be issued within several weeks.

Kagan said he doesn't want to defy the zoological association. "If we did that, we'd risk our accreditation," he said.

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