

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release | November 16, 2015

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Woodland Park Zoo donates its elephants to Oklahoma City and Saint Louis Zoos

SEATTLE—Woodland Park Zoo has transferred ownership of its Asian elephants to zoos in Oklahoma City and St. Louis.

Female elephants Bamboo, 48, and Chai, 36, were moved to Oklahoma City Zoo this past May when Woodland Park Zoo decided to close its elephant exhibit. Another female Asian elephant, Sri (pronounced “see”), 35, has been living at Saint Louis Zoo since 2002.

Oklahoma City and Saint Louis Zoos have asked Woodland Park Zoo to transfer ownership of the elephants. Because both OKC and Saint Louis Zoos are accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA), the elephants will continue to receive a consistent, high standard of day-to-day care.

Donating animals to other zoos is standard practice among institutions accredited by AZA. The three elephants were under loan agreements. Loan agreements fully provide for the care and well-being of the animals and may stipulate that subsequent offspring or the animal under the agreement is returned to the “loan” institution.

“Donating our elephants does not mean we will stop caring about them. A legal document does not change that,” said Woodland Park Zoo Acting President and CEO Bruce Bohmke. “We will continue to care deeply about their well-being and, between our institutions, staff will remain in close contact about the welfare of Bamboo, Chai and Sri. They remain in excellent hands.”

All three elephants are thriving with their new families. Bamboo and Chai were introduced to OKC Zoo’s four females through a careful, incremental process. Within three weeks Bamboo and Chai were fully introduced to OKC’s herd and spending all of their time together. “We could not have hoped for a smoother transition or better outcome. Bamboo and Chai are compatible with their new family and this natural social grouping has been enriching overall for all of the elephants. Thanks to the dedication and expertise of OKC Zoo’s skilled and experienced elephant staff, our elephants are successfully integrated with their new family so the timing is ripe to relinquish ownership,” said Bohmke.

Sri is an established member of the herd at Saint Louis Zoo where she has lived for 13 years. “Sri is a valuable auntie to their young elephants. She plays an important role in the breeding program as a member of their elephant matriarchy,” explained Bohmke. “Donating Sri to Saint Louis Zoo makes sense now that we have closed our elephant program. Our fellow colleagues are very pleased with our decision and they are committed to continuing to take good care of her.”

Woodland Park Zoo made the difficult decision in late 2014 to close its elephant program because it could not add to its existing herd of two middle-aged Asian elephants to build a multigenerational herd in the foreseeable future. Oklahoma City Zoo was selected based on recommendations from animal welfare experts because of their multigenerational herd managed in restricted contact, state-of-the-art facility, skilled and experienced keeper and veterinary staff, a healthy environment, and established history of stable finances and leadership.

“Formalizing the transfer of ownership to Oklahoma City and Saint Louis Zoos allows us to focus on the future of the area of the zoo which formerly contained the elephant exhibit,” said Bohmke. The zoo staff has begun a thorough assessment of the 3.4-acre space, its



operations, and programming to determine what kind of exhibit and which animals should replace the old exhibit.

Bohmke said the zoo will involve members of the public in that decision. "We are currently analyzing various choices and we look forward to reaching out to our members, guests, neighbors, and community sometime in the first quarter of next year and sharing those concepts."

Visit www.zoo.org for more information about Woodland Park Zoo.

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