



*"Creating a just and sustainable world where people and wildlife, thrive, together."*

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Karen Bass  
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Council Member  
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Zoo Commissioners

Karen B. Winnick  
President

Bernardo Silva  
Vice President

Justin Mikita

Daryl Smith

Elnie Vannatim

Denise M. Verret  
Chief Executive Officer  
& Zoo Director

# MINUTES

## BOARD OF ZOO COMMISSIONERS OF THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES

TUESDAY, JULY 15, 2025 – 10:00 AM

Los Angeles Zoo  
Grand Room  
5333 Zoo Drive  
Los Angeles, Ca 90027

### MEMBERS PRESENT

Karen Winnick  
Bernardo Silva  
Justin Mikita  
Daryl Smith  
Elnie Vannatim arrived at 10:14

### VISITORS

None signed in

### COMMISSION STAFF

Denise Verret  
Cristina Flores

### MEDIA

None signed in

### ZOO GENERAL COUNSEL

Steve Houchin

### AGENDA ITEM 1 - CALL TO ORDER

Commission President Winnick called the meeting to order at 10:03AM.

### AGENDA ITEM 2 - APPROVAL OF MINUTES FOR MEETING OF JULY 15, 2025

Commission President Winnick requested a Motion to approve the minutes of the July 15, 2025 meeting. Commission Vice President Silva so moved, Commissioner Mikita seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

### AGENDA ITEM 3 - GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

No Comments

### NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL COMMENTS

No Comments

### AGENDA ITEM 4 – ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Vice President Silva nominated Karen Winnick for President, the motion passed unanimously.

President Winnick nominated Vice President Silva for Vice President, the motion passed unanimously.

### AGENDA ITEM 5 - PRESENTATION – Wildlife Confiscations

Misha Body, Zoo Deputy Director of Animal Programs gave the following presentation:



- Ms. Body discussed the Los Angeles Zoo's role in combating wildlife trafficking, a key focus of its conservation strategy, detailing the various ways the Zoo contributes:
  - Caring for confiscated animals from agencies like U.S. Fish & Wildlife, CDFW, and USDA;
  - Educating guests onsite and online about the impacts of the illegal wildlife trade; and
  - Supporting international partners addressing trafficking at its source.
- From 2015–2019, there were 834 cases and 48,793 live specimens confiscated at U.S. ports. Los Angeles had the highest number of cases; Miami had the most individual specimens due to seizures of small animals like coral.
- A “case” involves one seizure event, which may include many animals or plants. “Specimens” refers to live individuals—animals or plants—confiscated in those cases.
- Agencies faced challenges placing animals quickly due to lack of facilities and time constraints, often relying on informal contacts. Some animals died as a result.
- In response, the Southern California Wildlife Confiscations Network was created in October 2023, coordinated by the AZA and led in part by the L.A. Zoo.
  - One point of contact now facilitates rapid placement of confiscated wildlife through a network of 39 vetted facilities.
  - The L.A. Zoo helped define facility standards and serves on the vetting committee.
- Since the network began, the L.A. Zoo has cared for:
  - 5 invertebrates, 1 bird, 6 primates, and 10 reptiles/amphibians, some still residing at the Zoo.
- Due to the network's success, a bipartisan federal bill was introduced in May 2025 to support expansion to a national level.
  - AZA's Executive Vice President Craig Hoover testified in June in support before Congress.
  - The legislation aims to provide funding and coordination for a nationwide wildlife confiscation network.
- In addition to direct care, the Zoo is active in awareness campaigns:
  - The “Not a Pet” campaign, in partnership with IFAW and Wildlife Trafficking Alliance, uses messaging to discourage exotic pet ownership; and
  - The World of Birds show reaches over 130,000 guests annually and highlights trafficking's impact on species like hyacinth, scarlet, and blue-throated macaws.
    - The Zoo also supports macaw nesting and reintroduction programs, aiding the recovery of wild populations.
- The Zoo's website and habitat signage share animal stories and actions the public can take to help.
- A wildlife trafficking awareness exhibit at LAX's Tom Bradley Terminal, launched with partners in 2024, educates travelers on what not to buy and has received significant media attention.
- Wildlife trafficking is a major conservation threat, and the L.A. Zoo is committed to addressing it through care, coordination, education, and global partnerships.

## **AGENDA ITEM 6 - GENERAL MANAGER REPORTS**

### **a. Animal Updates**

Misha Body, Deputy Director of Animal Programs provided updates which included the following:

- For the first time in five years, Tasmanian devils have returned to the L.A. Zoo.

- On June 20th, the Zoo received two three-year-old males, Crush and Danny Zuko, from the Cressy Wildlife Facility in Tasmania, through a partnership with the Australian government.
- Their names are inspired by their litter's Disney-themed naming tradition:
  - Crush is named after the sea turtle in *Finding Nemo*—shy but curious.
  - Danny Zuko is named after the character in *Grease*—calm, confident, and gentle.
- Currently, Crush and Danny are in quarantine and acclimating behind the scenes at the Tasmanian Devil Habitat.
- They are expected to be on public display by the end of the month.
- The previous photos shown were of former Tasmanian devils, not Crush and Danny.
- When asked about the facial tumor disease impacting Tasmanian devils, Dr. Jake Owens responded that some progress is being made, but the disease remains a challenge.

b. Zoo Director Updates

Denise Verret, Zoo Director gave the following updates:

- Summer Programs
  - The Migrant Education Program returned this summer in partnership with LAUSD's Beyond the Bell, serving migrant, immigrant, and refugee students.
  - Attendance started low (21 students vs. usual 45–50) due to local immigration raids.
  - A virtual component was added for students unable to attend in person.
  - The program provides joy, normalcy, empathy, and connection with animals amid difficult community challenges.
  - The family culmination day is tomorrow, showcasing student projects and learning.
  - Zoo Camp is in full swing, serving over 670 campers (PreK–4th grade), concluding August 1, with a special week for grades 5–8 following, which has a 99% fill rate.
- Enhanced Guest Experience
  - A new temporary exhibit, Little Ray's Wild World: Stories of Conservation and Hope, opened July 1, featuring live reptiles and interactive experiences; it runs through September 30 and has welcomed 1,800+ guests.
- Community Engagement
  - The Discover & Go program with the LA Public Library increased free ticket use by nearly 92%, serving over 9,000 residents.
  - Outreach efforts include tech support to help people access the program and partnerships to boost awareness.
  - Community engagement events and partnerships reached over 12,500 people this fiscal year and continue to grow.
- Attendance & Revenue
  - Fiscal year 24-25 attendance is projected at 1.47 million guests, including 409,000 members (28% of attendance), despite 13 closure days from weather events.
  - Educational group attendance exceeded 130,000 students, with many free or low-cost programs.

- Total revenue topped \$20 million, slightly down from last year due to attendance but expected to increase after an August 11 fee increase.
- Service Systems Associates (SSA) Partnership
  - The Zoo has partnered with Service Systems Associates (SSA) to manage the Zoo's memberships, special events and publications programs.
  - SSA has extensive experience serving over 88 institutions nationwide, including several California zoos and aquariums.
  - The SSA leadership team includes longtime L.A. Zoo employees with deep institutional knowledge.
  - The City Council approved a five-year contract with SSA, with options to extend for two additional terms of five years each, for a total of up to 15 years.
- Superlative Group Partnership
  - The Zoo partnered with the Superlative Group to manage its sponsorship program.
  - Founded in 1904 and based in Cleveland, Ohio, Superlative Group has generated over \$4 billion in sponsorship and naming rights for various venues worldwide.
  - They bring both local (Metro, Cal State LA, Sacramento Zoo) and national experience with mission-driven organizations.
  - Superlative is conducting an asset valuation and sponsorship assessment to identify opportunities aligned with the Zoo's mission and brand.
  - The partnership aims to maximize sponsorship revenue while maintaining the Zoo's values and public image.
  - This strategic approach will help fund Zoo programs and enhance the guest experience through carefully selected sponsors.
- Zoo in the News
  - The Los Angeles Zoo announced 10 healthy California Condor Chicks for the 2025 breeding season. The story received widespread media coverage, including local, and international outlets in Canada, New Zealand, and Brazil.
  - Wild World: Stories of Conservation & Hope, the Zoo's temporary exhibit was covered by various local outlets.
  - The Zoo released 450 Endangered Southern Mountain Yellow-Legged Frog tadpoles bred on-site into streams in the San Gabriel Mountains, in partnership with the U.S. Geological Survey. This long-running conservation project garnered positive media coverage from [CBS-LA](#), [NBC-4 LA](#), [The L.A. Daily News](#), [MyNewsLA](#) and [KCRW Radio](#).

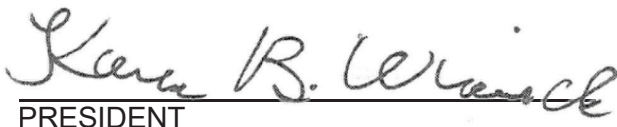
#### **AGENDA ITEM 7 - OLD BUSINESS**

None

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no more business to come before the Commission, President Winnick requested a motion to adjourn the meeting; Commission Vice President Silva so moved and Commissioner Mikita seconded; the motion passed by unanimous vote and the meeting was adjourned at 10:45 AM.

ATTEST:

  
PRESIDENT

  
SECRETARY