American Zoo and Aquarium Association  
ACQUISITION / DISPOSITION POLICY  
Adopted by the Board of Directors on March 21, 2000

I. INTRODUCTION

The American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA) was established, among other reasons, to foster continued improvement in the zoological park and aquarium profession. One of its most important roles is to provide a forum for debate and consensus building among its members, the intent of which is to attain high ethical standards, especially those related to animal care and professional conduct. The stringent requirements for AZA accreditation and high standards of professional conduct are unmatched by similar organizations and also far surpass the United States Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service’s requirements for licensed animal exhibitors. AZA member facilities must abide by a Code of Professional Ethics - a set of standards which guide all aspects of animal management and welfare. As a matter of priority, AZA institutions should acquire animals from other AZA institutions and dispose of animals to other AZA institutions.

AZA accredited zoological parks and aquariums cannot fulfill their important missions of conservation, education and science without living animals. Responsible management of living animal populations necessitates that some individuals be acquired and that others be removed from the collection at certain times. Acquisition of animals can occur through propagation, trade, donation, loan, purchase, capture, or rescue. Food animals are not accessioned into the collection. Disposition occurs when an animal permanently leaves the institution for any reason. Reasons for disposition vary widely, but include cooperative population management (genetic or demographic management), reintroduction, behavioral incompatibility, sexual maturation, animal health concerns, temporary loan or transfer, or death. The AZA Acquisition/Disposition Policy (A/D) was created to help (1) guide and support member institutions in their animal acquisition and disposition decisions, and (2) ensure that all additions and removals are compatible with the Association’s stated commitment to “save and protect the wonders of the living natural world.” More specifically, the AZA A/D Policy is intended to:

1. ensure that the welfare of individual animals and conservation of populations, species and ecosystems are carefully considered during acquisition and disposition activities;

2. maintain a proper standard of conduct for AZA members during acquisition and disposition activities; and

3. ensure that animals from AZA member institutions are not transferred to individuals or organizations that lack the appropriate expertise or facilities to care for them.

The AZA Acquisition/Disposition Policy will serve as the default policy for AZA member institutions. Institutions may develop their own A/D Policy in order to address specific local concerns. Any institutional policy must incorporate and not conflict with the AZA acquisition and disposition standards.

Violations of the AZA Acquisition/Disposition Policy will be dealt with in accordance with the AZA Code of Professional Ethics. Violations can result in an institution’s or individual’s expulsion from membership in the AZA.

II. Group or Colony Based Identification

For some colonial, group-living, or prolific species, such as certain insects, aquatic invertebrates, schooling fish, rodents, and bats, it is often impossible or highly impractical to identify individual specimens. These species are therefore maintained, accessioned, and disposed of as a group or colony. Therefore, when this A/D Policy refers to animals or specimens, it is in reference to both individuals and groups/colonies.
III. ACQUISITION REQUIREMENTS

A. General Acquisitions

Animals are to be acquisitioned into an AZA member institution’s collection if the following conditions are met:

1. Acquisitions must meet the requirements of all applicable local, state, federal and international regulations and laws.

2. The Director or Chief Executive Officer of the institution is charged with the final authority and responsibility for the monitoring and implementation of all acquisitions.

3. Acquisitions must be consistent with the mission of the institution by addressing its exhibition/education, conservation, and/or scientific goals.

4. Animals that are acquired for the collection, permanently or temporarily, should be listed on institutional records.

5. Animals may be acquired temporarily for reasons such as, holding for governmental agencies, rescue and/or rehabilitation, or special exhibits. Animals should only be accepted if they will not jeopardize the health, care or maintenance of the animals in the permanent collection or the animal being acquired.

6. Animals that are acquired by birth should be listed on an institution’s records. For some species which are known to have a relatively high neonatal mortality rate, for example fishes, the recording of birth may occur after the animal reaches 30 days of age.

7. The institution must have the necessary resources to support and provide for the professional care and management of a species, so that the physical and social needs of both specimen and species are met.

8. Attempts by members to circumvent AZA conservation programs in the acquisition of SSP animals are detrimental to the Association and its conservation programs. Such action may be detrimental to the species involved and could be construed as a violation of the Association’s Code of Professional Ethics. All AZA members should work through SSP species coordinators and appropriate propagation groups in efforts to acquire of SSP species.

9. Animals are only to be acquired from sources that are known to operate legally and conduct their business in a manner that reflects and/or supports the spirit and intent of the AZA Code of Professional Ethics as well as this policy. Any convictions of federal, state, or international wildlife laws should be reviewed, as well as any previous dealings with other AZA accredited institutions.

B. Acquisitions From the Wild

The establishment of long-term, self-replicating, wild animal populations for education and wildlife conservation purposes is a unique responsibility of AZA member zoos and aquariums. To accomplish these goals, it may be necessary to acquire wild-caught specimens. When acquiring animals from the wild, careful consideration must be taken to evaluate the long-term impacts on the wild population. Any capture of free-ranging animals should be done in accordance with all local, state, federal, and international wildlife laws and regulations and not be detrimental to the long-term viability of a population or species. In crisis situations, when the survival of a population is at risk, rescue decisions are to be made on a case-by-case basis.

IV. DISPOSITION REQUIREMENTS
A. Living Animals

Successful conservation and animal management efforts rely on the cooperation of many entities, both within and outside of AZA. While preference is given to place animals within AZA member institutions, it is important to foster a cooperative culture among those who share the primary mission of AZA accredited facilities. The AZA draws a strong distinction between the mission, stated or otherwise, of non-member organizations and the mission of professionally managed zoological parks and aquariums accredited by the AZA. An accredited AZA member balances public display, recreation, and entertainment with demonstrated efforts in education, conservation, and science. While some non-member organizations may meet minimum daily standards of animal care for wildlife, the AZA recognizes that this, by itself, is insufficient to warrant either AZA membership or participation in AZA’s cooperative animal management programs. When an animal is sent to a non-member of AZA, it is imperative that the member be confident that the animal will be cared for properly.

Animals may only be disposed of from an AZA member institution’s collection if the following conditions are met:

1. Dispositions must meet the requirements of all applicable local, state, federal and international regulations and laws.

2. The Director or Chief Executive Officer of the institution is charged with the final authority and responsibility for the monitoring and implementation of all dispositions.

3. Any disposition must abide by the Mandatory Standards and General Advisories of the AZA Code of Professional Ethics (see Appendix I). Specifically, “a member shall make every effort to assure that all animals in his/her collection and under his/her care are disposed of in a manner which meets the current disposition standards of the Association and do not find their way into the hands of those not qualified to care for them properly.”

4. Animals shall not be disposed of at animal auctions. Additionally, animals shall not be disposed of to any organization or individual that may use or sell the animal at an animal auction. In transactions with AZA non-members, the recipient must ensure in writing that the animal will not be disposed of at a wild animal auction or to an individual or organization which allows the hunting of the animal.

5. Animals shall not be disposed of to organizations or individuals that allow the hunting of these animals or their offspring. This does not apply to individuals or organizations which allow the hunting of only free-ranging game species (indigenous to North America) and established long-introduced species such as, but not limited to, white-tailed deer, quail, rabbit, waterfowl, boar, ring-necked pheasant, chukar, partridge, and trout. AZA distinguishes hunting for sport from culling for sustainable population management and wildlife conservation purposes.

6. Attempts by members to circumvent AZA conservation programs in the disposition of SSP animals are detrimental to the Association and its conservation programs. Such action may be detrimental to the species involved and could be construed as a violation of the Association’s Code of Professional Ethics. All AZA members should work through SSP species coordinators and appropriate propagation groups in efforts to deacquisition SSP species.

7. Domesticated animals are to be disposed of in a manner consistent with acceptable farm practices and subject to all relevant laws and regulations.
8. Live specimens may be released within native ranges, subject to all relevant laws and regulations. Releases may be a part of a recovery program and any release must be compatible with the AZA Guidelines for Reintroduction of Animals Born or Held in Captivity, dated June 3, 1992.

9. Detailed disposition records of all living or dead specimens must be maintained. Where applicable, proper animal identification techniques should be utilized.

10. It is the obligation of every loaning institution to monitor, at least annually, the conditions of any loaned specimens and the ability of the recipient to provide proper care. If the conditions and care of animals are in violation of the loan agreement, it is the obligation of the loaning institution to recall the animal. Furthermore, an institution’s loaning policy must not be in conflict with this A/D Policy.

11. If live specimens are euthanized, it must be done in accordance with the established policy of the institution and the Report of the American Veterinary Medical Association Panel on Euthanasia (Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association 202 (2): 229-249, 1993).

12. In dispositions to non-AZA members, the non-member’s mission (stated or implied) must not be in conflict with the mission of AZA, or with this A/D Policy.

13. In dispositions to non-AZA member facilities which are open to the public, the non-member must balance public display, recreation, and entertainment with demonstrated efforts in conservation, education, and science.

14. In dispositions to non-AZA members, the AZA members must be convinced that the recipient has the expertise, records management capabilities, financial stability, and facilities required to properly care for and maintain the animals. It is recommended that this documentation be kept in the permanent record of the animals at the AZA member institution.

15. If living animals are sent to a non-member research institution, the institution must be registered under the Animal Welfare Act by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. For international transactions, the receiving facility should be registered by that country’s equivalent body with enforcement over animal welfare. In all cases, the research must be for the direct benefit of the individual or species.

B. Dead Specimens

Dead specimens are only to be disposed of from an AZA member institution’s collection if the following conditions are met:

1. Dispositions of dead animals must meet the requirements of all applicable local, state, federal and international regulations and laws.

2. Maximum utilization is to be made of the remains, which could include use in educational programs or exhibits.

3. Consideration is given to scientific projects that provide data for species management and/or conservation.

4. Records are to be kept on all dispositions, including animal body parts, when possible.

5. SSP and TAG necropsy protocols are to be accommodated insofar as possible.

V. PETS AND THE PET TRADE
AZA member institutions recognize the importance of pets, but believe the vast majority of wild animals do not make good pets. However, there are a few cases where disposition to private, established hobbyists and reputable pet industry groups, can be both beneficial to the individual animal and the survival of the species. Particularly, cases where providing zoo / aquarium bred animals will lessen and possibly eliminate the need for animals to be taken from the wild to support the pet trade. The most common examples deal with some fish, coral, bird and reptile species. In all cases, the welfare of the individual as well as the survival of the species are of primary concern.

In addition to the requirements listed in earlier sections, an animal is only to be disposed of from an AZA member institution’s collection if the following conditions and regulations are met:

1. No animal should be disposed of to private hobbyists or the pet industry if it would create a public health risk, create a safety risk, or have a negative impact on the conservation of that species.

2. Under no circumstances are primates to be disposed of to a private individual or to the pet trade.

3. Inherently dangerous wild animals do not make suitable pets. Dispositions to the pet trade should be examined on a case by case basis and the advice and support of the AZA sub-groups, such as the Taxon Advisory Groups (TAGs), are to be sought in determining the impact on the individual and species.

4. Fish and aquatic invertebrate species that meet ANY of the following, are inappropriate to be disposed of to private individuals or the pet trade:
   - species that grow too large to be housed in a 72-inches-long aquarium (the largest tank commonly sold in retail pet stores)
   - species that require extraordinary life support equipment to maintain an appropriate captive environment (e.g. cold water fish & invertebrates)
   - species deemed noxious (e.g. grass carp)
   - species capable of inflicting a serious bite or venomous sting (e.g. piranha, lion fish, or blue-ringed octopus)
   - species that are of wildlife conservation concern

5. No animal is to be disposed of if close human interactions poses a threat of the spread of disease to the animal and/or human.

VI. TRANSACTION FORMS

AZA member institutions will develop transaction forms to record animal acquisitions and dispositions. These forms will require the potential recipient or provider to adhere to the AZA Code of Professional Ethics, the AZA Acquisition/Disposition Policy, and all relevant AZA and member policies, procedures and guidelines. In addition, transaction forms must insist on compliance with the applicable laws and regulations of local, state, federal and international authorities.