

Global Commons Talking Points 9/13/14

- 1) In considering how we in zoos and aquariums could right the world from its continuing loss of nature's integrity,
- 2) We have a singular advantage in the fundamental service we provide to visitors, which is direct experience with the diversity of life. Although modern communications media offer many ways to witness and learn about other life forms, people still relish directly and safely encountering animals of all kinds, but especially large species from other parts of the world.
- 3) Our facilities and operational practices have changed as we have become more conscious of the conditions of the natural world and more knowledgeable about the needs of our animal guests and their species. Indeed, many of our institutions might well be considered to be Conservation and Caring Centers. So from an animal perspective, we are now often operating embassies for their species, with simulations of their home environments as part of the direct experience of visitors, as illustrated here by the Swamp at Brookfield Zoo.
- 4) However, the overall situation for the existence of the diversity of life forms has not improved, as very evident from the previous talks in this session. And the future looks even grimmer, as testified to in books such as these, and often in the daily news media.
- 5) I am here because last year three speakers at the meeting of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums cited 700 million annual visitors to such facilities around the world. That number is exaggerated by including repeat visitors, but if we also consider including visitors to botanic gardens, nature centers, national parks, and natural history museums, a tenth of the world's population has some direct experience annually with the diversity of life in these settings. Whether our visitors have deep biophilic feelings or simply casual interest, they almost certainly at least care about the very existence of other life forms.
- 6) I suggest that we therefore mobilize our visitors in concern for the global commons, which very much includes the diversity of life forms unmodified by us. While global citizenship movements have so advocated, in practice their concerns have focused on social justice issues in our own species, rather than on the welfare of the physical and biological global commons essential for life's existence.

The challenge is plain. The reason for suggesting visitors assume a role as global citizens in that this implies accepting responsibilities, as any citizen of a local community or nation-state realizes, even as they enjoy rights and privileges therein.

- 7) There are two principal ways to respond to the challenge: One is by having our own organizations become responsible global citizens in their actions and operations. The other is by engaging and involving our visitors and our members as global citizens.
- 8) The AZA has provided guides for saner and more sustainable operations, and many of our organizations have pursued this course, notably here Denver Zoo, the acknowledged sustainability leader in its region, with the help of elephant poo.
- 9) Here is a fine example of how our organizations can lead in action on a very important issue – divestment from fossil fuel investments. The Conservation Breeding Specialist Group has successfully campaigned for such action by many zoos and aquariums and associated individuals.
- 10) In rural coal-mining Pennsylvania, the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund pioneered in representing nature in policy-making affecting local environments. The Fund advised on incorporating this principle in the new constitution of Ecuador and in the international proclamation of the rights of nature sponsored by Bolivia. The Fund can advise our organization in stepping up to such service if other organizations in your regional community are not able to do so.
- 11) There are potential organizational allies in many parts of our country to ensure the basic welfare of the regional environment, the Local Commons. Shedd Aquarium, Lincoln Park Zoo, Brookfield Zoo and Field Museum have been strong partners within the Chicago Wilderness Alliance, now 340 organizations strong with federal, state and local governmental agencies, small and large conservation NGOs and a corporate council of 38 businesses. Three of the four major program initiatives of Chicago Wilderness deal with the Global Commons concerns in the regional context extending from southern Wisconsin to the southwestern tip of Michigan. The fourth program is devoted to preparing the next generation to live sustainably and compatibly with the natural world. The Metropolitan Greenspaces Alliance is fostering similar programs in several urban areas including Houston, L.A., Portland, Cleveland, Milwaukee, and most recently Denver.
- 12) As we address the recruitment of visitors and members in global citizenship for the betterment of the global commons, it is important to communicate meaningfully. Most of our country's people, and thereby our visitors, live in urban areas and have little personal interaction with the natural world. So in getting them to care for nature, it is very helpful to now have a text on conservation psychology to inform our communications for this purpose. This may be especially important as our organizations are further engaged with the millennial generation. I am pleased that at Brookfield Zoo Carol Saunders was instrumental in developing this important field of study with authors Susan Clayton and Gene Myers. .

- 13) Generally visitors will not know very much about the environmental conditions of species featured in our facilities. We should supply such information as well as updates on the conditions of the Global Commons.
- 14) Calling attention to individual ecological footprints will be helpful in engaging visitors as global citizens. As indicated here, there are many ways to reduce one's ecological footprint, and it is essential to do so since it is thought that humanity is now consuming annually 150 % of the earth's productivity. .
- 15) Encouraging involvement in maintaining and improving the Local Commons of the landscape such as county, state and national parks, wildlife preserves, and private lands designated for conservation.
- 16) Each zoo and aquarium wants to attract visitors as members for continuing financial and political support. But identifying regional, national and international organizations devoted to different aspects of biodiversity conservation could be directly helpful to individual visitors and at least gives recognition of the sharing of concern by a wide and diverse alliance.
- 17) I believe that concern for the global commons can be encouraged through recognition of successes in addressing problems and threats. Here are three examples – the Montreal Protocol has been followed by most nations for the last 27 years to reduce the Antarctic hole in the ozone layer caused by CFC production; similarly, acid rain from coal-fired plant emissions of carbon and nitrous oxides has been very much reduced in the USA and in Europe. And we have great species restoration stories to celebrate such as that of the whooping crane, the California condor, and the black-footed ferret, thanks largely to some of our own institutions.

- 18) In engaging visitors, members, staff and governing boards of our organizations as global citizens for the global commons, there are various sources that may be helpful. The small book on Global Environmental Governance by Gus Speth and Peter Haas is particularly good in describing existing group mechanisms to achieve a sustainable relationship with the natural world. They also recognize that most action is indeed local, whatever the global condition of concern.

In this connection, you may recall Caring for the Earth, the first attempt to construct an effective approach to sustainability by three international organizations WWF, IUCN, and UNEP. Much later, the idealistic and ethical principles that should govern our relationships with the natural world and our own kind were expressed in the Earth Charter. You may also find useful the very recent collection of thinking by ecological economists and social scientists. At this time we do not have a similar action-oriented treatise from those directly concerned with the conservation of biological diversity. In this regard I note that the CBD or Convention on Biological Diversity came into being in 1992 and there are now 192 signatory nations, but not the USA. If our visitors become global citizens in the fashion indicated and if we zoos and aquariums represent their feelings and values well, such behavior by our government will not be tolerated. And on the way to a sustainable and respectful relationship with our earthly home, we might progress by founding a parallel to the World Health Organization in a World Environment Organization.

- 19) I hope that the AZA will embrace the challenge posed and arrange an ongoing effort to assist our organizations in recruiting their visitors to become global citizens with responsibilities for the global commons, and especially biological diversity. I believe that collectively we can change the world!!