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DENVER ZOO RELEASES INFORMATION ON HIPPO TRANSPORT

Denver, CO (Oct. 31, 2007) – As the zoo continues to investigate the death of hippo Hazina, who died October 27, a day after being transported to Calgary Zoo, Denver Zoo is releasing information known at this time about the incident. The zoo, while mourning the loss of their beloved Director of 37 years, Clayton Freiheit, is working diligently to determine what could have been done differently to prevent the loss of Hazina.

Denver Zoo animal care staff hired Planned Migration, an experienced animal transport company that is well-respected within the zoo community and considered an expert in the field. Denver Zoo has worked with Planned Migration since April of 2000, and has transported 108 different animals with this company, including primates, pachyderms, felines, bears and birds, totaling 51 different trips, without incident.

“I checked on Hazina every two to three and a half hours and remained in contact with Denver Zoo throughout the trip. Hazina showed no outward signs of physical distress at any time during the drive. We had no idea that she was not doing well until we got to Calgary Zoo,” said Chris Danhauer, the owner and operator of Planned Migration that lead the transfer.

Danhauer is licensed by the USDA as an animal transporter and has nearly nine years experience transporting animals, in addition to 13 years of experience as a zookeeper. Danhauer has worked during his career at Denver Zoo with pachyderms, and served as the lead on numerous animal transfers for Denver Zoo. Denver Zoo felt and continues to feel extremely confident with his abilities to safely transport animals.

Hazina left Denver Zoo on Thursday, Oct. 25 travelling in a 16-foot long by nearly five-foot wide and six-foot, 10-inch tall crate. Denver Zoo chose the size of the crate to protect the hippo during transport. The crate gave Hazina enough room to move forward and backward, allowed her to lie down in the sternal position, and allowed enough room for food, water and hay bedding. By design, Hazina could not turn around in the crate, which is well-established practice to prevent her from injuring herself during the trip in case of sudden shifting or movement. The USDA does not have regulations regarding the size of crates used in the transfer of hippos.

Beginning in mid-July, Zoo staff began familiarizing Hazina with the crate through daily training sessions. Through positive reinforcement, Hazina was trained to enter the crate. During her daily trainings, zoo staff monitored Hazina’s progress to ensure she was comfortable within the space when the time for the move came.

Danhauer and another driver drove Hazina in a climate controlled truck (68-70 degrees) to the Canada border, regularly checking on Hazina. Danhauer spoke with Denver Zoo throughout the trip, discussing Hazina's behaviors and appearance. Both Danhauer and Denver Zoo staff felt her behaviors were normal.

"Hazina had been seen moving in the crate. Although she also was seen lying down during the trip, we felt this was normal based on her behavior here at Denver Zoo. We had no reason to believe that she was not doing well," says Bowie.

Hazina saw two vets at the Canada border just three and half hours from Calgary, both as part of the customs procedure for border crossing. The U.S. veterinarian was from the USDA and the Canadian vet was with CFIA. Both visually inspected Hazina, neither finding anything wrong.

Denver Zoo chose ground transportation to move Hazina for her best interest. Although the zoo has used air transportation in the past, in this case it was not an option because neither of the air carriers Denver Zoo has utilized transports animals into Canada. Other carriers that service Calgary could not accommodate the size of the large crate. Air transportation can have inherent pitfalls including the fact that is very rare that anyone is able to check on an animal during the flight, there can be unforeseeable time spent on the tarmac and flights have loud foreign sounds that can frighten animals. Regardless of mode of transport, all animals must go through inspections when leaving and entering a country.

The decision to move Hazina was made to support hippo conservation. In the wild, hippos are listed as vulnerable by the World Conservation Union (IUCN). In zoos, hippos are overseen by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums' Population Management Plan (PMP), which ensures the healthy longevity of many different species in accredited institutions. Hazina's move was made to support the captive population. She was paired to mate with Calgary Zoo's male hippos. Denver Zoo has successfully transported 14 hippos dating back to 1966 without incident.

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