





STATE OF

MIND

It has been just a little over six years ago that Zanesville, Ohio, became a national news story. Bears were chasing horses, and lions and tigers, monkeys and cougars—even a baboon—were wandering around the city, terrifying residents. Fifty-six animals in all had escaped from a local farm.

Tom Stalf, president and chief executive officer of the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium in Powell, Ohio, and The Wilds in Cumberland, Ohio, was attending an international meeting on rhinoceroses at the Zoo when the call came alerting him to the escape. He and his Zoo team rushed to assist local authorities in capture and rescue of the panicked animals. In fact, he was the first to enter the farmhouse of Terry Thompson, the owner of the animals, encountering a noxious stench. Thompson had apparently opened the doors to the cages, let the animals out and then killed himself.

But something good came out of that horror. Stalf, along with the

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ENGAGE *with* LOCAL
LAWMAKERS

BY ALINA TUGEND

other seven Association of Zoos and Aquariums-affiliated institutions in the state grouped under a 25-year-old organization called the Ohio Zoo Consortium joined together to work with Ohio legislators in passing its first law restricting ownership of dangerous wild animals.

“I was very proud of working together with state representatives and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources,” Stalf said of the 2014 law.

The Zanesville situation was extraordinary, but the combined efforts of AZA-accredited facilities on a statewide basis to address policy and legislative issues that affect zoos and aquariums has proved to be highly effective—and more necessary than ever.





That's because, while AZA tracks federal and state legislation that can affect AZA facilities, increasingly counties and other localities are considering laws and regulations, which are more difficult to follow at the national level, said Jennifer Keaton, AZA's vice-president of congressional affairs. And when state legislation is considered, it is vital for AZA members in the state to engage with their elected officials.

One example, she said, is Nosey's Law, passed by the New Jersey state legislature, which banned the use of elephants and other wildlife in traveling animal acts. It was named after a 35-year-old African elephant used in traveling circuses across the country, who authorities say was abused and neglected. She now lives in an elephant sanctuary in Tennessee.

The bill was vetoed by former Gov. Chris Christie, the New Jersey legislature is expected to consider similar legislation again this session. Although AZA strongly supports animal welfare, the problem with the bill, Keaton said, is that it could have affected a zoo's or aquarium's legitimate educational efforts, for example, "if an AZA-accredited facility takes an alligator or penguin offsite," she said. "It was an all-hands effort to defeat the bill, and this is a good example of how we need to be working together."

California, which has the most AZA-accredited facilities in one state—24—established the California Association of Zoos and Aquariums (CAZA), in 1986. It is officially incorporated as a 501(C)(6) organization, which under IRS tax regulations means it has the same standing as Chambers of Commerce or Boards of Trade.

CAZA collects membership dues, primarily to pay for a lobbyist in Sacramento, said Donna Damson, corporate director of government/community relations for San Diego Zoo Global in San Diego, Calif.

One of the more recent pieces of legislation CAZA lobbied for, along with the Humane Society of the United States was a bill banning the use of bullhooks and other devices to control elephants.

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“In that case, the Humane Society asked us to join them,” Damson said. It was signed into law two years ago.

Damson noted that sometimes CAZA is successful and sometimes it's not—legislation banning orca breeding and shows was opposed by CAZA, but was passed and signed into law in 2016.

“But if we want to encourage or oppose legislation, it's better to do it as a group,” she said.

Florida, with 21 AZA-accredited and certified zoos and aquariums, has its own group, the Florida Association of Zoos and Aquariums (FAZA), started 17 years ago and incorporated four years ago.

Larry Killmar, zoo director of Zoo Tampa at Lowry Park in Tampa, Fla., was familiar with CAZA when he worked as deputy director of collections at the San Diego Zoo. When he was asked to head FAZA, “I saw what CAZA did and that was the model I wanted to follow,” he said. “The first Florida wildlife commission meeting I went to, 15 different zoo people showed up in 15 different cars and the same thing was said by 15 different people,” Killmar said. “I said, ‘this has to change.’”

In particular, he felt that incorporating FAZA as a 501(C)(6) was key because “if you're not incorporated, you don't have credibility with the legislators.”

A key issue in Florida, where private ownership of wildlife is not unusual, is legislation on exotic animals. When two cobras escaped a few years ago, state wildlife officials decided that it was time to take another look at rules regarding venomous snakes.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission “said shut down all exotic snakes, which could have affected zoos,” said Killmar. “So FAZA helped come up with regulations that tightened up the law rather than simply said no venomous snakes. That was a real test of the FWC law enforcement division and FAZA working together.”



Both CAZA and FAZA have annual meetings, and Killmar said the first time the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission was invited to the meeting, “it was a little tense.” But things calmed down, the FWC law enforcement officers now come to every meeting and the U.S. Department of Agriculture is vying to be included.

“We now have a dialogue rather than conflicts,” he said.

Some states have more loosely-knit organizations; for example, in Washington, the four AZA-accredited facilities aren’t officially incorporated, but have been highly successful in their joint efforts. Their most important victory to date has been an initiative the four institutions, along with animal welfare advocates, conservation organizations and a committed philanthropist, put before Washington voters, in 2015.

The initiative, which passed overwhelmingly, closed a loophole in federal law regarding trafficking within states, said Kerston Swartz, senior public affairs and advocacy manager of Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, Wash. *National Geographic* magazine called it “the country’s first ever comprehensive state ban on commerce in endangered animal species.” (See *Connect* May 2016 for an in-depth look at the campaign’s efforts.)

The group first tried to get a bill passed through the state legislature regulating ivory and rhino horn sales but it never came to a vote due to strong opposition by special interests

groups. So, the idea was born to bring the vote directly to the people.

“The relationship between the Washington zoos and aquariums has been instrumental in our success,” Swartz said “I hope this is a long-term alliance and we continue to change laws and policies.”

Swartz added that the combined efforts aren’t just about lobbying: “We share resources like crazy. If I need information on the Canada lynx, for example, I call Point Defiance and get information. We have supported the Seattle Aquarium’s efforts to reduce plastic in the ocean. And we’re just plain friends—we like each other.”

That’s how it is in Kansas, where AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums join under an umbrella called Kazoo.

“It’s very informal, non-chartered, no bylaws and no dues,” said Robert Jenkins, executive director of Rolling Hills Zoo in Salina, Kan. “We meet twice a year and talk about things happening in our facilities and legislation.”

The goal is also to make sure legislators are aware of what Kazoo members have to offer, and to that end, for the past two years, the organization has held an annual dinner at the Topeka Zoo in Topeka, Kan., for state legislators.

“We’re a source of information,” Jenkins said. “It’s very, very rewarding to work together with people in the capital and see results, but it’s important to recognize that it takes time to build those relationships.”

Killmar agreed. The important thing is to have a voice at the table, he said and “that’s the role we play.” If there is no united voice from AZA-accredited facilities in the state, that creates a void, he added, and there’s a higher likelihood that laws and policy that might adversely affect those facilities will be put into place.

“We can fill that void,” Killmar said. “We’re giving them a resource they didn’t have before.”

Or as Swartz said: “Any time an AZA institution is building a campaign—whether legislative or a behavior change—and need to exponentially increase the number of people involved, they should first go to AZA institutions in the state and see if there’s an opportunity to partner.”

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