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Money woes, warnings, PETA pressure plague zoo

Zoo

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When Enders said his name, he promptly came down from his perch and opened his mouth in a wide-toothed grin at her, hoping for a sample of cantaloupe. When he's not swinging on the fence and climbing around, Enders puts on one of his favorite movies. And Joe watches, enamored with the television.

Several of the larger animals, including the lioness, were on the verge of death before coming to the Zoo.

"She was about to go to the taxidermist," Enders said. They rescued her from that destiny as well as several other animals.

Several of the cats actually were owned as pets. But when their owners learned that it was illegal to keep them, they turned to the little sanctuary in Wilmer.

Enders said people still try to drop off domestic animals, but they can't take anymore, and they've been warned about it in the past. "We don't have a rehabilitation license," she said. "But we get to keep the ones we have."

Many warnings

The zoo has been warned a lot in recent years.

Inspected by the USDA multiple times, the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals has led a campaign against the zoo in an effort to shut it down.

"The animals at the Mobile Zoo have suffered enough as the result of negligence, and as these repeat violations indicate, this neglect will likely continue until the facility is shut down and the animals are sent to reputable sanctuaries," says



Nibbles, a raccoon, pokes its head out in search of a bite at the Mobile Zoo. (Sharon Steinmann/ssteinmann@al.com)

PETA Foundation Deputy General Counsel Delcianna Winders. "Mobile Zoo's brazen willingness to flout the law is just one reason why PETA urges families to steer clear of roadside zoos."

The PETA inquiries caused the USDA to go back after reported violations.

Underweight animal

The most recent report, the USDA cited the zoo for 18-year-old Misha appearing underweight.

The report said that the zoo's veterinarian had examined the animals but needed to follow up more often.

According to Enders, there's an explanation, but the USDA doesn't care.

"Misha has arthritis and muscle atrophy," she said. Misha was born and raised at the zoo, and her parents also had arthritis. Misha, at 18, is so old that she cannot even hoist herself into a large tub of water. She has to be hosed down daily and fights flies that irritate her ears. The zoo orders a special spray to combat flies, but the spray was not refilled when the last inspection took place.

The report also noted the

flies on Misha and advised contacting the vet again.

"She'll never gain the weight they want her to," Enders said.

Misha, along with the other cats, are fed a diet of 70 percent chicken and 30 percent red meat with a vitamin supplement. The zoo recently was cited for providing the big cats fish, which must be approved.

The facility also was cited for rust on some fences and dust in the chimp enclosure. The USDA mandates bi-weekly sanitation and absolutely no rust.

Lack of money

The zoo is working on complying, but it's not easy with a lack of manpower and money.

Recently, Mobile Paint donated paint so that fences could be painted and spots mended.

The USDA report also said bamboo was a problem at the zoo, prohibiting inspection of some of the lion, tiger and bear areas. Volunteers have been working at cutting the bamboo back, but the zoo needs more volunteers, Enders said. "We're doing

what we can."

In many areas, such as near the monkey enclosures, the bamboo provides shade for animals and additional protection against wind damage in a storm.

One of the citations that Enders said the zoo is most frustrated with is their repeated fence violation. The fence around much of the monkey exhibit is two inches shorter than the mandate.

"It's just 2 inches," said owner John Hightower. "Two inches. It's frustrating."

The bears have been rough lately, and with four grown bears, it's not an easy feat for one person to herd them into the den so their enclosure can be cleaned.

While visiting the bear enclosure, a bear with a fresh cut was visible. His brother had swiped his face. Enders immediately contacted the vet to examine him.

Insect problem

Enders said on the day of inspection, she hadn't had the opportunity to pin the bears in the den and access their enclosure. Thus, the USDA cited the zoo for visible feces and a rotting fish that had flies around it.

The biggest visible problem was insects, which the USDA noted. The inspector himself reported being bitten by bugs and worried about the animals as well as their water and food supply which could be contaminated. The zoo suggests that guests wear bug repellent, but the USDA said that a better bug control mechanism needs to be implemented.

Perhaps most frustrating, the owner and the manager said, was the citation for lack of employees.

Given a June 15 deadline, Enders was able to enlist her

boyfriend to help out. Two military volunteers come every other week as well, and two other people semi-regularly.

"People have good intentions, but they don't always follow-up," she said.

Enders recently launched a campaign to help renew the zoo and raise funds to rectify some of the issues in the USDA reports as well as give some of the bigger cats more space.

The fundraiser only raised a little more than \$100.

"We need paint, cement, cinder blocks, supplies mainly," Enders said. "We don't have any recurring donations."

The facility offers service hours to organizations that wish to help them out such as Boy Scouts and fraternities, but few groups have made the trip to Wilmer in recent years.

Thus, a handful of people take care of dozens of animals.

Enders said the zoo requires \$6,000 a month to operate and pay their bills including food, medicine and utilities.

"That's to break even," she said. For an adult, zoo admission is just a little over \$8.

They also sell popsicles, soda and bottled water for \$1 apiece.

Enders acknowledged that people have called, asking about the welfare of the animals after the calls from PETA for them to shut down.

"I invite them to come down and see the zoo for themselves," she said.

Enders' game

Smiling, Enders said one of her favorite animals is Tiger, the 20-year-old tiger. Her breed is only expected to live to 15. "We have animals

outliving their life expectancies, but no one ever tells you that," she said.

A man visits often to bring the zoo peanuts to sell to children to feed the animals.

At \$3 a bag, visitors can take a few peanuts and place it in a PVC pipe that leads to the enclosure several feet away. The animals excitedly head to the end of the pipe, often catching the nuts as they tumble down.

The USDA noted that the PVC pipes need to be cleaned more often since food travels from them to the animals.

"It's just always something," Hightower said.

Every enclosure meets the standards for space, but the zoo would like to shift some animals around and expand some of the areas.

They don't offer a petting zoo, but the cavy, medium-sized creatures that resemble a hybrid guinea pig rodent, love to be fed and people can walk around their exhibit.

Double fences exist between guests and the big cats.

An alligator named Gatorade looks forward to when Enders makes her round around his in-ground pond because he gets to play his favorite game.

A PVC pipe hooked up to a hose gives him his own water park to play in, which he eagerly rushes to and snaps at the stream.

Another citation was for the raccoon's water bowl being dirty. Enders said she bought a new bowl and washes it out daily, but the raccoons tip it over. Only the raccoons and the cavy have water in bowls; every other animal has a direct "licker" line to a well in their enclosures.

In the summer heat, some guests have also expressed concern for the bears and larger animals.

"Most of them have always been here," said Enders. "They are acclimated."

Faced with more USDA citations and heavy PETA pressure, Enders fears for the zoo's future.

"It depends on what the USDA does to us," she said.

"They've hammered us hard," Hightower said.

For now, the zoo is in immediate need of volunteers and supplies. To assist with either, contact the zoo at mobilezoo@hotmail.com or through the zoo's Facebook page.

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Public Announcement

AL Army National Guard (ALARNG) Mobile Organizational Maintenance Shop-28 (OMS-28) Administrative Record File

In 2005, site characterization and groundwater monitoring was conducted in association with an unrelated diesel underground storage tank at the ALARNG operated Field Maintenance Shop -28 (FMS-28) and a chlorinated solvents plume, primarily trichloroethylene, tetrachloroethylene and breakdown compounds, was discovered in the groundwater. Subsequent investigations were conducted between 2007 and 2013 to further characterize the soil and groundwater conditions and delineate the horizontal and vertical extent of chlorinated solvents contamination at the FMS-28 site. The source of the chlorinated solvents contamination has not yet been identified.

The FMS-28 is located in the manufacturing district of the Brookley Aeroplex in Mobile County, near downtown Mobile at 1622 South Broad Street 36615, between Interstate 10 and Mobile Bay. The ALARNG operates the FMS (formerly known as the Organizational Maintenance Shop and please note that all reports and administrative reference file will state the name of the facility as the OMS-28 as it was referred to during the findings) in the northwest corner of the Brookley Aeroplex on property owned by the Alabama Armory Commission. Mobile Airport Authority owns the property directly west of the FMS-28 site, and residential property is located to the north.

The environmental investigation at the FMS-28 site is being performed by the Alabama Army National Guard, in accordance with the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), under the regulatory oversight from the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM).

The ALARNG has set up an Administrative Record File at the following online location:
<http://www.mobileoms28.net>

The purpose of the file is to hold all information the Army uses to determine a remedial action or cleanup action. Under section 113(k) of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), as amended by the Superfund Amendment and Reauthorization Act (SARA), 42 USC 9601et. Seq., the Army is required to establish an Administrative Record File for every remedial or removal response action and to make a copy of the file available (at or near the project).

An information repository contains current and historical information, technical reports, and reference documents concerning the ongoing environmental investigation at the site. The OMS-28 information repository is available for viewing online at the website listed above or at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District Office, 109 St. Joseph Street, Mobile, Alabama, by contacting Melissa Shirley at (251) 690-2616 or via e-mail at melissa.l.shirley@usace.army.mil.

The public is invited to review the contents of the Administrative Record File and information repository. The online information repository will continue to be updated until such time that the cleanup is complete and no further remediation is warranted. If you have any questions about the Organizational Maintenance Shop, Administrative Record File, or information repository, contact the Alabama Army National Guard, Sheri M. Festoso, at (334) 271-8183 or email: sheri.m.festoso.nfg@mail.mil or U.S. Army National Guard, Brett A. Merkel, at (703) 601-7785 or email: brett.a.merkel.civ@mail.mil.