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Julie Woodyer
Campaigns Director, Zoocheck
788 ½ O'Connor Drive
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4B 2S6

30th March 2017

Dear Ms. Woodyer,

I am writing to offer my professional opinion on the necessary steps to safeguard Yupik's health and welfare, based on the evidence of her physical examination under anaesthesia on 22nd March 2017

I am a UK veterinarian with 12 years of experience in the field of zoological medicine including 9 years of experience focussing on clinical management of bear species, including hundreds of anaesthetics and clinical examinations. I currently teach courses in wild animal welfare at The University of Edinburgh and consult with zoological organisations around the world to improve the health and welfare of zoological species.

On March 22nd 2017 Yupik underwent a successful and comprehensive examination under anaesthesia. The results demonstrated that a number of errors were recorded by the Morelia Zoo in her previous examination in 2012. Specifically we established that she does not suffer from cardiac pathology and that Yupik is generally healthy and fit to be transported in 2017. However Yupik does suffer from a number of conditions that are associated with and exacerbated by her current environment and husbandry. Yupik required two root canal treatments and two tooth extractions to address dental damage done by bar-biting, an abnormal repetitive behaviour. Despite this dental pathology being noted several years ago, no treatment was implemented and this neglect led to serious dental infection, including the development of an oronasal fistula. Yupik's body condition is thin with very low muscle mass and poor muscle tone due to her restricted environment, poor diet, and lack of exercise, and she suffers from arthritis, a degenerative condition exacerbated by her poor muscle tone and lack of exercise opportunities. It is impossible for these conditions to be adequately addressed in Yupik's current location, as the Morelia zoo does not have the resources to provide an appropriate cold-weather naturalistic environment, or comprehensive veterinary care to Yupik as she ages. As Yupik could potentially live another 15-18 years, it is imperative that her long-term quality of life is assured. A move to a more natural enclosure in a colder climate would improve her body condition score, allow for natural feeding and foraging behaviours, build her muscle mass, support her joints and reduce her behavioural frustration.

The Morelia zoo has demonstrably not been able to meet Yupik's physical or behavioural needs. Her current care has resulted in a misdiagnosis of a cardiac condition, misdiagnosis of abdominal ascites, inappropriate medication, neglect of her long-term dental disease, and development of behavioural abnormalities indicative of fear and frustration. Despite the work that zoo staff have done to improve her enclosure and plan this health evaluation, it is clear that they do not have the resources or skills to manage Yupik as she ages, and her health condition deteriorates. Bears are excellent candidates for environmental rehabilitation and respond very well to improved habitats. I strongly recommend that Yupik is transported as soon as possible to a natural, large, temperate environment such as Yorkshire Wildlife Park, in order to limit the damage caused by her current environment, and to allow her an opportunity for rehabilitation to physical and psychological health.

Kind regards

Dr. Heather Bacon

