In Brief

National Zoological Park: Improvements Needed to Strengthen Monitoring of Recommendations to Resolve Animal Care Issues


What OIG Did

The objective of this audit was to determine to what extent the Smithsonian National Zoological Park’s (National Zoo) management has addressed recommendations to improve animal care operations based on several reviews conducted at the Rock Creek Park campus.

Background

The National Zoo’s mission is to provide leadership in animal care, science, education, and sustainability. Providing quality care to the approximately 1,800 animals in its care is also central to the mission.

The National Zoo operates in an environment that is regulated by both governmental and non-governmental organizations. For example, it is subject to the federal Animal Welfare Act and also must uphold standards to maintain its accreditation with the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

In 2012 and 2013, the National Zoo underwent inspections based on concerns about animal care, including escapes and deaths, and an accreditation review. Some of the animal care incidents occurred at the Cheetah Conservation Station, which houses cheetahs, zebras, and other African species.

What Was Found

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) found that the National Zoo had no centrally managed process to monitor recommendations made to improve animal care operations. Because the National Zoo was not centrally monitoring recommendations, OIG had to compile a list of the 51 recommendations from five reports issued in 2013 by the National Zoo’s Animal Care and Use Committee, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, the Smithsonian’s Office of Safety, Health and Environmental Management, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The recommendations related to: (1) updating policies and procedures, (2) repairing or maintaining animal care facilities or equipment, (3) acquiring additional staff or equipment, and (4) updating and documenting training.

OIG then worked with National Zoo staff and management to determine the status of corrective actions for each recommendation.

Based on the analysis of the 51 recommendations, OIG concluded that 7 recommendations had not been addressed as of April 2015. OIG met with National Zoo management to discuss the outstanding recommendations, and by July 2015, 5 recommendations had been resolved. In March 2016, more than 2 years after they were made, the remaining 2 recommendations were closed.

A key internal control involves active monitoring of the implementation of recommendations until corrective actions are completed. Although the Smithsonian is not required to follow the Office of Management and Budget’s (OMB) Circular A-50, this circular addresses monitoring of recommendations; and it contains steps that management should take to ensure prompt resolution of recommendations, such as maintaining accurate records on the status of recommendations until they are resolved.

The National Zoo needs to develop a monitoring process for tracking all animal care recommendations. By implementing a monitoring process, the National Zoo will be in a better position to ensure timely action is taken to address animal care recommendations identified in the future.

What Was Recommended

OIG recommended that the Director of the National Zoo develop and implement a monitoring process for all recommendations related to animal care that incorporates the steps outlined in OMB Circular A-50. Management concurred with this recommendation.

For additional information or a copy of the full report, contact OIG at (202) 633-7050 or visit http://www.si.edu/oig.