

## Outside zoo experts seek Maggie move

**OPEN LETTER: Group says California sanctuary is best for Alaska elephant.**

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Les Schobert knows enough about Alaskans to know we don't like Outsiders telling us what to do.

But he knows even more about elephants, so he has joined seven other international zoo experts urging the Alaska Zoo to accept a one-way, all-expenses-paid trip that would send Alaska's only elephant, Maggie, to a sanctuary in California.

The group sent a letter to the zoo dated Friday.

"Pussyfooting around things hasn't worked. Maybe this will," said Schobert, a former curator for Busch Gardens, the Los Angeles Zoo and the North Carolina Zoological Park. "Why be quiet any longer? Maybe this will have some influence on them to do the right thing for Maggie."

Alaska Zoo spokeswoman Eileen Floyd said the zoo is still undecided about where to send Maggie and is considering a couple of facilities, including the Performing Animal Welfare Society sanctuary (PAWS) in San Andreas, Calif. -- the one endorsed by Schobert and his colleagues in their letter.

She said the zoo has no response to the letter other than to acknowledge its contents.

"It's, like, thanks for the input," she said.

PAWS, the letter says, "can give Maggie the time, space and constant, 24-hour care that she needs for successful integration, which is critical for an elephant who has lived in isolation for so long."

The writers urged the zoo to send Maggie to the sanctuary as soon as possible.

PAWS upped the ante in the battle for Maggie last week when TV celebrity Bob Barker and sanctuary co-founder Ed Stewart came to town, promising to pay all of Maggie's moving expenses. The offer includes a \$100,000 donation to the Alaska Zoo.

"There's a helluva an offer on the table," said Schobert, who said he has friends at PAWS but otherwise isn't associated with the sanctuary. "How anyone could turn it down is beyond me."

But Charlie Summat, a director of the Elephants of Africa Rescue Society in Salinas, Calif., who is not involved in the battle over Maggie, said people should stop pushing the zoo so hard.

"I think PAWS would be considered far more seriously if they would back off and stop applying this pressure because it just makes the decision for the zoo more complicated and uncomfortable, being bullied this way," he said.

Schobert said he considered entering the debate in May, when fire crews and winches were needed twice in four days to hoist Maggie after she was unable to stand up on her own.

But after hearing Alaskans react to the views of Outside experts, he decided to cancel plans to visit Maggie and keep quiet.

"I read the comments that said 'Outsiders, stay out of here, we can take care of our own business' and I thought, OK, I can handle that -- as long as they do the right thing," he said.

"I've kept my mouth shut up to this point and now it's like, 'C'mon folks.' It's puzzling to me why it's delay, delay, delay. She went down in May and now it's September and nothing's been done. That just runs all over me."

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