

Frequently Asked Questions

Fire Preparedness at the Performing Animal Welfare Society's ARK 2000 Sanctuary

How does PAWS prepare for a natural disaster, such as a fire?

PAWS has a comprehensive emergency plan on file with Cal Fire and the California Department of Fish & Wildlife that focuses on fire prevention and preparedness in order to protect our animals and staff. This includes creating defensible space around all structures by removing brush, weeds, grass and low branches through the use of mowers, weed-eaters, and environment-friendly goats. A full, 3,000-gallon water tanker truck is permanently stationed at ARK 2000. Two large wells each provide 300 gallons of water per minute and can be used to suppress fire and maintain defensible space. Five large holding tanks supplied by the wells contain a combined 100,000 gallons of water. There are 12 fire hydrants located throughout the property near every permanent structure. All keepers are in radio contact with one another. The local fire protection district and Cal Fire have keys to the gates of the sanctuary and frequently visit to ensure fire protection readiness. During an event, we regularly meet with fire department personnel to assess the situation and plan accordingly.

What government agencies have inspected and approved of PAWS' emergency plan?

Regional fire personnel and agents from the Department of Forestry, California Department of Fish & Wildlife, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture have routinely inspected ARK 2000 and given PAWS high marks for its emergency plan, calling it a model program.

How is the ARK 2000 sanctuary property different from the surrounding areas?

The 2300-acre ARK 2000 property does not resemble the areas shown in the media during the Butte Fire. Those areas are filled with dense, dry brush and pine forests, which are highly combustible. ARK 2000 was a cattle ranch before being bought by PAWS and much of it had been cleared for grazing, leaving open grasslands and oak. PAWS intentionally selected this property because it could be defended against fire, even in the face of drought. There is also a river that runs the entire length of the property.

Was PAWS ever ordered to evacuate during the Butte Fire?

No, PAWS was never under an evacuation order.

Does the PAWS plan include evacuating the animals if necessary?

Evacuation of some animals is possible, but only if absolutely necessary. It is standard industry practice for facilities with large mammals to "shelter in place" during an emergency situation. This is considered to be best practice because of the stress, potential injuries, and even death, which can occur when wild animals are quickly moved. The safety and welfare of our animals is always our first priority.

What other facilities practice "shelter in place"?

Zoos accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA)¹ and sanctuaries accredited by the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS). Every animal-holding facility has to be prepared for fire, floods, earthquakes, hurricanes and other natural disasters particular to their areas.

What protections do the elephants have when sheltering in place?

The elephant barns are extremely large and made mostly of fire-resistant metal built over concrete or bare soil. The expansive habitats surrounding the elephant barns have little fuel for a fire because the elephants naturally forage and eat down the vegetation. If necessary, the elephants can be called to the barns and safely confined during a fire.

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Can you tell us about elephant training and transport?

PAWS trains its elephants using only positive reinforcement methods that allow us to provide all aspects of care, including routine husbandry and necessary veterinary treatment. Elephants are commonly transported by air, crate and trailer using only this training system and without using negative reinforcement methods that rely on the bullhook, a cruel instrument that may soon be prohibited in California. PAWS has been moving elephants for decades without using a bullhook. We own transport crates and a truck that can hold multiple elephants.

How are the bears and big cats protected?

Carnivore dens and surrounding areas are constructed of fireproof materials including concrete. Many animals are conditioned to come when a whistle is blown, so they can be confined to a concrete den area in case of fire. Fire hose hook-ups are located throughout the area, and water sprinklers can be activated. As a preventive measure, keepers regularly use weed-eaters to remove vegetation and trim branches. Evacuation is possible, but only if absolutely necessary.

How many animals are there at the ARK 2000 Sanctuary?

Eight Asian and African elephants, 17 tigers, seven bears, two lions, and a black leopard.

How did the animals react during the Butte Fire?

The elephants remained very calm. The bears and big cats acted normally and were eager to interact with their habitats. Fortunately, the wind was blowing away from the sanctuary most of the time, so smoke was not much of a factor.

How is the sanctuary staffed during a fire?

PAWS President Ed Stewart and a group of very dedicated, professional keepers remain at the sanctuary to care for the animals. PAWS has full-time veterinary care, and, in addition, veterinarians are on call for emergencies 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We cannot say enough about the courage and commitment that our staff displayed during the Butte Fire, showing up to work every day even though some of them had been evacuated from their homes or suffered their own devastating losses.

What kind of support did PAWS see during the Butte Fire?

We are grateful to the local community, businesses, our supporters, and to the AZA accredited zoos and GFAS accredited sanctuaries that genuinely offered or provided assistance. We are forever indebted to Cal Fire and to all the brave firefighters and emergency responders for their support and protection.

PAWS wants to remind everyone that many people have suffered greatly because of the Butte Fire. We urge you to donate generously to the organizations that are providing food, shelter and support.

The Nation's First Elephant Sanctuary



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PERFORMING ANIMAL
WELFARE SOCIETY
Founded in 1984
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Footnote

¹ Hall, Carla. "No foolproof zoo disaster plan." *Los Angeles Times*, May 29, 2007. (Article cites representatives of various AZA-accredited zoos, including the Oakland Zoo, San Diego Zoo, San Francisco Zoo and Los Angeles Zoo stating that during an emergency event they shelter in place. Oakland Zoo President and CEO Joel Parrot, DVM, stated: "Basically we secure the animals in the night houses and then hunker down." A San Diego Zoo public relations manager stated that during a fire that came up to the fence line of the San Diego Wild Animal Park the zoo "left the large animals in their expansive habitats where they could attempt to move away from smoke if necessary. 'The space itself provides protection,'" Simmons said.) <http://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-griffithfire29may29-story.html>