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Contact: Catherine Doyle, PAWS' director of science, research and advocacy, 323-301-5730, cdoyle@pawsweb.org

Elephant and Conservation Experts From Around the World Condemn Elephant Rides

Leading authorities say rides are abusive and do not help wild elephants

San Andreas, California (July 15, 2013) – The Performing Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) released a statement today signed by elephant experts from around the world – including conservationists, scientists, veterinarians, former keepers and zoo directors – condemning the use of elephants for rides. The statement was released before the July 16th meeting at which the Nevada County Fair in Grass Valley, California, will decide whether to uphold a contract for elephant rides.

“Elephant ride providers are trying to use conservation as a public relations ploy to distract the public from the fact that elephant rides are unsafe, inhumane and outdated,” said PAWS' president, Ed Stewart, who has more than 32 years of experience caring for elephants. “PAWS is joined in this statement by some of the world's leading elephant experts and conservationists, and they all oppose the use of elephants for rides.”

The statement is endorsed by foremost experts, including Cynthia Moss, director of the Amboseli Trust for Elephants, a world-leading authority who has been studying elephants for more than 40 years in Kenya in one of the longest running studies of elephants. Her pioneering work has contributed significantly to elephant conservation and been featured in books, documentaries and a series on Animal Planet.

Another signatory, Dr. Keith Lindsay, is a conservation biologist with 35 years of experience studying and conserving elephants in their natural habitats. He is a scientific advisory panel member and researcher with the Amboseli Elephant Research Project in Kenya.

Lindsay explained: "Forcing elephants to carry people on their backs does nothing to educate the public about the challenges facing wild elephants, nor does it raise any useful funds for their conservation. All it does is cause suffering for the captive elephants involved."

Training for rides involves violently breaking and training elephants, and controlling them through dominance and fear of pain for the rest of their lives.

Handlers use the bullhook, a steel rod resembling a sharpened fireplace poker, to routinely prod, hook and strike elephants so they comply with every command.

Have Trunk Will Travel, the company that would provide the elephant rides, was caught on video repeatedly striking elephants with bullhooks during training and using an electric shock device to force an elephant to perform a circus trick.

The professional statement concludes: “We advise event organizers to reject elephant rides, and we strongly urge the public to refrain from riding elephants, to oppose elephant rides if they are proposed for a community event, and to support legitimate conservation organizations that are making a real difference for elephants.”

For more information on PAWS, please visit www.pawsweb.org.

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Founded in 1984, PAWS operates three sanctuaries for captive wildlife in Galt, Herald and San Andreas, California, that are home to more than 100 rescued and retired animals, including eight elephants, African lions, bears, tigers and other exotic animals.

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