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# El Paso Zoo Accreditation Denied; Zoo Plans to Appeal

**EL PASO, Texas**—The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) has denied accreditation to the El Paso Zoo and Botanical Gardens following its routine five-year review. The Zoo plans to appeal the decision.

While the AZA Accreditation Commission cited “deferred maintenance” in older guest areas of the facility, no concerns were raised regarding animal care, which remains the Zoo’s top priority. Notably, the inspection team praised the Zoo’s veterinary program, animal welfare practices, and overall operations.

“We are disappointed by the Commission’s decision, especially given the substantial improvements already made and those in progress,” said Zoo Director Joe Montisano. “This does not reflect the quality of care we provide or the guest experience we’ve worked hard to create.”

AZA evaluators pointed to aging infrastructure, including the South American Pavilion—one of the Zoo’s oldest structures dating back to the 1960s. Renovations to the Pavilion’s roof and HVAC system have already been completed, with interior work scheduled to begin later this year. The Zoo is also replacing all older wooden railings with modern metal alternatives, beginning with the Asia section and continuing throughout the park.

“El Paso is proud of its Zoo and the exceptional care it provides to animals,” said Mayor Renard Johnson. “We stand behind the Zoo’s efforts and are committed to addressing the issues raised in the review. I have no doubt the Zoo will come back stronger and regain accreditation.”

City Manager Dionne Mack echoed that support, emphasizing the Zoo’s long-term investment and high standards. “Over the past decade, we’ve made major improvements through the 2012 bond program—including new exhibits, upgraded infrastructure, and enhanced guest amenities. The Zoo remains a cornerstone of our community, and we are confident in its path forward.”

The Zoo will formally appeal the decision and, if necessary, reapply next year once additional facility upgrades are completed.

AZA accreditation is a voluntary process that evaluates institutions on rigorous standards in animal care, safety, education, and conservation. The El Paso Zoo, which has held accreditation since 1980, is owned by the City of El Paso and also regulated by the USDA.

## About the El Paso Zoo and Botanical Gardens

The El Paso Zoo and Botanical Gardens stretch across 35-acres and house animals representing over 220 species, including critically endangered species. Accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA), the El Paso Zoo celebrates the value of animals and natural resources. It creates opportunities for people to rediscover their connection to nature. To learn more, visit [www.ElPasoZoo.org](http://www.ElPasoZoo.org).

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**Media Contact:** Rick Isaias  
Strategic Communications  
[isaiasra@elpasotexas.gov](mailto:isaiasra@elpasotexas.gov)  
(O): 915.212.0000  
(M): 915.355.6611