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VIRGINIA ZOO PLANS TO RELOCATE ELEPHANTS LISA AND CITA

Norfolk, Virginia – This year, the Virginia Zoo staff and Board embarked on a long and arduous journey to explore the options available for the two African elephants housed at the Virginia Zoo. Following the recommendation of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), the oversight and governing body of accredited zoos in the U.S., Lisa and Cita will relocate to Zoo Miami in 2016.

Studies of elephants in the wild show that female elephants are very social and naturally live in multi-generational herds with matriarchal leaders. Research in the past decade and more recently has compelled the AZA leadership, elephant holding institutions, and elephant care staff to put forth a requirement that by 2016 zoos must maintain elephant herds with three or more members in order to maintain the complex social and psychological health of the animals.

Committed to doing what is best for the Zoo's elephants, the Virginia Zoo moved forward in May of 2015 to explore opportunities available for Lisa and Cita. This included visiting with a qualified AZA-accredited institution, Zoo Miami, and The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee. After assessing and exploring each location, the Virginia Zoo has decided that Zoo Miami affords Lisa and Cita the best combination of climate, space and socialization while adding a high level of conservation education value to the zoo experience of their nearly 1 million visitors annually.

"We care for all the animals at the Zoo and Cita and Lisa are especially loved," comments Greg Bockheim, Executive Director. "Nothing is more important to us than their welfare. The combination of compassionate care, the science of elephant studies, and the expertise of the elephant community show us that Zoo Miami is the best choice for our girls."

Zoo Miami is home to two older female African elephants, Mable and Peggy. They live in a spacious exhibit and are cared for by a team of elephant keepers assigned solely to their elephant program.

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Zoo Miami is also a larger institution and therefore employs a higher staffing level in their veterinary department which will benefit our elephants as they age. As the only zoo in the continental U.S. with a sub-tropical climate, Zoo Miami can maintain elephants outdoors both day and night, twelve months a year.

“The Virginia Zoo has been a part of the Hampton Roads community for more than a century. As we learn more about the wildlife of the world we find there are often better ways to take care of animals which requires making changes that are not always going to be pleasant for any of us,” says Bockheim. “We are committed to looking forward, to always providing a wonderful place for animals and people and to participating in a vision that benefits all wildlife for future generations.”

The elephants will relocate to their new home during the spring of 2016. The Virginia Zoo will celebrate their significant contributions to our community during the time leading up to their relocation.

Visit www.virginiazoo.org/elephant-news for more information, details and images.

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About African Elephants

African elephants are the largest land animal in the world. They can grow to 29-34 feet long, reaching heights of 11 feet tall and weighing up to 4-7 tons. The females are smaller than the males and have smaller tusks. Cita, age 47, is a famous Hollywood elephant, starring in *The Color Purple*, *Sheena Queen of the Jungle* and *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*. She is the younger of the Virginia Zoo's two elephants. Lisa, age 42, has been at the Zoo since 1976 and is the larger of the two elephants.

About the Virginia Zoo

The Virginia Zoo, located in Norfolk, Virginia is home to more than 500 animals representing over 100 different species. Founded in 1900 and residing on 53 landscaped acres in Lafayette Park, the Virginia Zoo has demonstrated a commitment to education and conservation for more than a century. The Zoo is an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. Visit www.virginiazoo.org or call (757) 441-2374 for more information.

About the Miami Zoo

Zoo Miami is the largest and oldest zoological garden in Florida, and the only tropical zoo in the continental United States. Today, Zoo Miami occupies almost 750 acres (340 developed), and is home to more than 3,000 animals representing over 500 different species. Like the Virginia Zoo, Zoo Miami is proud to be active in many global wildlife and environmental conservation initiative. Visit www.zoomiami.org for more information.