



## North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources

Michael F. Easley, Governor

November 21, 2008

William G. Ross Jr., Secretary

Zoo Study Commission  
16 West Jones Street  
Raleigh, NC 27699

Dear Chairs and Members of the Zoo Study Commission:

I would like to send my sincerest apologies for not being able to be with you this morning. DENR senior staff and I have been called to a transition meeting for Governor-elect Perdue that we must attend. I have had the opportunity to talk with the chairs of the Commission and would like to share briefly with you my thoughts on opportunities that have been identified since our last meeting.

Research conducted by the Zoo shows that there are many zoos throughout the United States that operate under a variety of structures. The structure of our own Zoo has been a topic of discussion in this Commission. Since the last meeting of the Commission, several ideas have been brought forward, including the idea that the Zoo spin-off into its own authority, under DENR.

In examining these options, however, I strongly believe that the Zoo can prosper if adjustments are made to the current framework and that the notion of restructuring the Zoo as a largely independent entity is no panacea and, indeed, has many drawbacks and dangers for the Zoo. The adjustments that are needed can be made in a number of ways, some internal within DENR, and some with the help of the legislature.

Purchasing and contract services have been identified as a point of frustration for the Zoo, since the contracts and purchasing agreements they put forward are unique in many ways. Please be assured that we will make certain that these contract and purchase issues are dealt with internally in a way that will result in a better, less frustrating process, while maintaining the integrity of DENR's processing and contract services as a whole.

The issue of purchasing and contract services can also benefit from a legislative solution. Currently, information technology purchases have the benefit of using "Best Value" procurement and "Government-Vendor Partnership" contractual relationships. After further examination of the Zoo's special contractual and purchasing needs and in looking at these options currently available for IT, it would make sense for the same purchasing and contract options to be available not only for the

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Zoo, but also for the Aquarium and the Museum of Natural Sciences. We would need the legislature's help in order to make this happen.

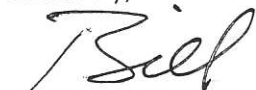
Furthermore, a steady stream of capital funding has been identified as a critical need for the Zoo in order to maintain the integrity of this state institution. I wholeheartedly support the concept of changing the Zoo Special Fund to mimic the Aquarium Fund. This would allow the Zoo to keep a portion of its receipts in order to have a revenue stream that would enable the Zoo to service bonded debt or special indebtedness. While this will also require legislation, as well as an appropriation, I feel that it is a critical step we need to take in order to make sure the Zoo has the financing it needs to make critical repairs and renovations, as well as to plan for and expand in the future.

When looking at the functions of the Zoo and how we can improve its operation, we need to examine every aspect of the Zoo's current setup. In doing so, I believe it is vital that we evaluate and update the fifteen-year-old agreement between DENR and the Zoo Society. To that end, I intend to appoint a small group of individuals from the Zoo and department to sit down with a similar group from the Society to review the agreement. We want to be sure that the agreement is serving the people of North Carolina as it should. We are grateful for the Zoo Society's many positive contributions to the Zoo over the years. I look forward to a constructive, open discussion with the Zoo Society on updating the agreement.

Lastly, I fully support seeking an extension of this Commission so that DENR is able to report back on its progress towards attaining the goals to which we have committed ourselves.

I am grateful for the time and effort that all of you on the Commission have committed to preserving and enhancing one of our state's crown jewels. Thank you, and we look forward to our work together!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Bill", written in black ink.

William G. Ross, Jr.