RHINOCEROS ADVISORY GROUP

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Primary goals

Considering the continuing crisis in rhino conservation, the primary goals of the AZA Rhinoceros Advisory Group are:

1. Develop viable *ex situ* populations as:
   a) reservoirs of genetic and demographic material as potential reinforcement of populations in the wild;
   b) subjects for research to improve conservation management *in situ* as well as *ex situ*; and
   c) ambassadors to stimulate public awareness and support, especially financial, for rhino conservation.
2. Improve captive husbandry and management through research in health, nutrition, behavior and reproduction.
3. Facilitate and coordinate among the SSP programs for all rhino species (in collaboration with the species coordinators and the management groups).
4. Assist (financial, technical, and administrative) with selected *in situ* efforts for rhino with emphasis on those projects that are significant, feasible, and provide appropriate opportunities for application of the particular expertise that the captive conservation community can provide in terms of intensive management technology.
5. Partner with the International Rhino Foundation (IRF) particularly in pursuit of goal 4.

Data table (current through 1 July 1997)

	Two years ago	One year ago	Current year
# of meetings	1	1	0
# of studbooks under umbrella	4	4	4
# of SSPs under umbrella	4	4	4
# of new studbook petitions submitted	4	0	0
# of new studbooks approved	0	4	0
# of new SSP petitions submitted	0	0	0
# of new SSPs approved	0	0	0

Special concerns

The conservation crisis for rhinoceros remains acute. There has been improvement on some fronts and setbacks on others.

In Africa, the situation for northern white rhino has deteriorated more than for any other taxa over the last year as a result of the civil war in Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo). There has been a virtual total breakdown of the protection system in Garamba National Park with a number of rhino either known or suspected of being lost to poachers. Numbers of rhino are now estimated at 24 maximum, down from a high of 32 in 1994. The zoo conservation community including many AZA institutions, led by Columbus Zoo and facilitated by the International Rhino Foundation, will continue to assist with their major project of support for guards as the situation permits. The southern white rhino have continued to increase (now ~ 7,600). Numbers of black rhino have continued their stabilization and even recovery over the last year at about 2,400; however, the poaching threat is still serious. However, 85 percent of southern white rhino and 40 percent of black rhino are in South Africa, which is still in early days of new nationhood.

In Asia, the Sumatran rhino, with fewer than 400 individuals, remains under intense poaching pressure although the rhino protection units (RPUs), formed with International Rhino Foundation (IRF) and IUCN/SSC Asian Rhino Specialist Group (AsRSG) facilitation, seem to be ameliorating the situation. A major colloquium on Javan rhino conducted on the two known populations in Indonesia (~50) and Vietnam (~20), under auspices of AsRSG/ IRF with support from the USFWS Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Fund (RTCF), has been encouraging in delineating more effective conservation action and greater coordination among the many organizations involved in conservation for this species (e.g. Minnesota Zoo Adopt-A-Park Program, AAZK Bowling for Rhinos, WWF, Fauna & Flora International, PHPA, IRF, AsRSG). Poaching pressure on the Indian rhino (~ 2,000) remains high and the possibility of a major decline is real.

The AZA Rhinoceros Advisory Group also remains concerned with the successful implementation and management of sustainable *ex situ* populations, especially considering the critical state of wild populations. All of the Rhino SSP programs have deficiencies that are receiving attention. Major problems relate to husbandry, health and reproduction of the animals as well as financial and physical resources. There has been improvement over the last year in growth and health of the black rhino population. However, a major demographic problem persists in the sex ratio of births in the populations of both eastern and southern black rhino (and perhaps is developing in Indian rhino). The captive populations must attain stability

and sustainability. Additionally, there is need to develop the methodology and programs to use captive populations for reestablishment and reinforcement of wild populations.

The Sumatran rhino continues as the greatest challenge in rhino conservation both *ex situ* and *in situ*. All three (1.2) surviving individuals in the SSP population (from a maximum of seven) have been consolidated at the Cincinnati Zoo. Last year it was stated in the Rhinoceros Advisory Group report that if no reproduction occurred during the year, the RAG recommendation would be that these animals be moved to larger and more natural enclosures in the southern United States. Since then, a major new reproductive research program has been initiated at the Cincinnati Zoo. Concurrently, efforts continue to develop managed breeding centers in native habitat in both Indonesia and Malaysia have progressed, especially at Way Kambas National Park in Sumatra, which should be ready to receive animals by September 1997. The situation for the SSP program for this species will be reassessed at the RAG meeting in November 1997.

There is continuing need to identify feasible and significant ways in which AZA institutions can assist with selected *in situ* programs for rhino conservation both financially and technically.

Progress toward goals

1. Implementation, with adaptive adjustments, has continued on the AZA SSP Master Plan for Rhino (consolidating all species) issued in February 1996. An update will be produced through a RAG workshop in November 1997 at White Oak Conservation Center.
2. Further implementation of the AZA Regional Collection Plan for Rhino has occurred as several new institutions have added rhinos and others have converted species.
3. The AZA Rhinoceros Husbandry Manual was published during the last year.
4. A new AZA SSP species coordinator has been appointed.
5. The eight major research projects that the RAG and IRF have been supporting are generating useful results. These projects comprise:
   a) one on the health of black rhino;
   b) one on the nutrition of all rhino;
   c) three on reproductive research on Sumatran rhino;
   d) three on reproductive research on African rhino but with extension to all rhino; and
   e) one on improved health/husbandry databases and tissue sample collections.

   A major new research project on possible management factors causing the skew toward males in sex ratios of rhino calves born in the SSP has been initiated.
6. The RAG has provided letters of support for other research projects applying for funding from sources other than IRF.
7. In an effort to correct for the skew toward males in sex ratio of calves in the black rhino, three female eastern black rhino have been acquired from the population in Addo Elephant National Park as part of a program through which two AZA institutions have provided National Parks Board of South Africa with funds for their *in situ* rhino conservation programs.
8. There has been significant progress on several components of the five-year action plan's *in situ* programs, through partnership with the International Rhino Foundation (IRF). Progress includes:
   a) Development of sanctuary programs for Sumatran rhino in Indonesia and Malaysia has advanced, especially in Way Kambas National Park (Sumatra), which should be ready to receive rhino in September 1997.
   b) Deployment of rhino protection units (RPUs) for Sumatran rhino, in Javan rhino in Indonesia and Malaysia.
   c) Finalization of plans to form RPUs for Javan rhino in Ujung Kulon National Park, Indonesia, and prepare for them in Cat Loc Nature Reserve, Vietnam.
9. The RAG/IRF Program Office has been working closely with the Office of International Affairs, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, on various projects involving implementation of the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Fund (RTFC) including:
   a) review of proposals submitted to USFWS for support under RTCF;
   b) receipt of grants for several IRF projects (RPUs and SRS); and
   c) conduct of the major Colloquium on Javan Rhino.
10. The web site, established in conjunction with the IRF (at new address http://www.rhinos-irf.org) has continued to evolve and now has a listserv operational to facilitate communication among various rhino constituencies including the Rhino TAG.
11. The RAG Program Office has continued to provide technical services for the AZA Rhino Master Plans and to maintain the AZA Rhino Regional Studbooks as well as the International Studbook for Sumatran Rhino.
12. The RAG has continued to facilitate interactions between the SSP and other Regional Captive Breeding Programs and the International Studbooks for African and Indian Rhinoceros.

13. There have been delays in publication of Around the Horn, The Rhino Conservation Newsletter (the joint newsletter of the AZA Rhino Advisory Group, the IRF, and the Rhino Global Action Plan (GCAP)) due to reorganization of the Program Office.

Financial report

Starting balance (as of 31 July 1996)	$1,910.76
Funds raised*	$0.00
Funds expended*	
Support for AZA husbandry manual	$1,800.00
Bank charges	$82.50
Total	$1,882.50
Ending balance (as of 30 June 1997)	$28.26

*Much of the AZA Rhino Advisory Group's activities relative to *in situ* programs and research projects are in

Short-term goals for upcoming year

1. Continue with implementation and produce update of the AZA SSP Master Plan for Rhino.
2. Continue financial support of management-oriented research on rhinos, especially in conjunction with the IRF Research Program. Continue efforts to better coordinate and catalyze research on rhino reproduction.
3. Continue and increase support of programs for *in situ* conservation of rhinos, again in conjunction with IRF.
4. Facilitate additional exchanges of rhino between SSP and other regional rhino breeding programs.
5. Contribute to improvement of the SSP program for Sumatran rhino.
6. Form technical support teams for management/manipulation of rhino.