

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 (RAG) are as follows:

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. Toward achievement of Goal 1, 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 (financially, technically, and administratively) selected *in situ* efforts for rhinos, emphasizing those projects that are significant, feasible, and provide opportunities for the captive conservation community to apply expertise in intensive management technology.
5. Partnership with the International Rhino Foundation (IRF), particularly in pursuit of Goal 4.

Data table (current through 1 July 1998)

	Two Years Ago	One Year Ago	Current Year
Meetings each year	1	0	2
Studbooks under umbrella	4	4	4
SSPs under umbrella	4	4	4
New studbooks approved	4	0	0
New SSP petitions submitted	0	0	0
New SSPs approved	0	0	0

Progress toward goals

1. The AZA SSP Master Plan for Rhinos and Rhinoceros Regional Collection Plan were updated at a workshop conducted at White Oak Conservation Center in November 1997. The RCPs were published in January 1998.
2. Further implementation of the AZA Rhinoceros RCP has occurred as several new institutions have added rhinos, and others have converted species.
3. The eight major research projects that the RAG and IRF have been supporting have generated useful results. These projects comprise: one on health of black rhinos; one on nutrition of all rhinos; three on reproductive research on Sumatran rhinos; two on reproductive research on African rhinos but with extension to all rhinos; and one on improved health/husbandry databases and tissue sample collections. These projects are continuing. 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. The Research Council of the RAG is convening in July 1998 to review and revise the five-year research master plan first formulated in 1993. Based on the results of these research projects and the recommendations of the RAG Research Council, the IRF will issue a new Request for Proposals for funds later in 1998. The RAG has provided letters of support for other research projects applying for funding from sources other than IRF.
4. In an effort to correct for the skew toward males in sex ratio of calves in the black rhino, the RAG is facilitating an exchange of rhinos between the AZA SSP and the SSCJ in Japan. The SSP will receive a female and the SSCJ will obtain two males.
5. There has been significant progress on several components of the five-year plan's *in situ* programs, through a partnership with the IRF. Progress includes:
 - a. Operation of *in situ* managed breeding programs for Sumatran rhinos in Indonesia and Malaysia. Rhinos were moved from zoos in the United Kingdom and Indonesia to the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary (SRS), Way Kambas National Park in January 1998, and attempts to breed them are in progress.
 - b. Rhino protection units (RPUs) for Sumatran rhinos and Javan rhinos in Indonesia and Malaysia continue their effective work.
 - c. An action plan has been formulated and is being implemented for Javan rhinos in Vietnam.

- d. Continued support for and consideration of new approaches for conservation of northern white rhinos in Garamba.
6. The RAG/IRF Program Office has continued to work closely with USFWS's Office of International Affairs on various projects involving implementation of the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Fund (RTCF) including:
 - a. review of proposals submitted to USFWS for support under RTCF;
 - b. receipt of grants for several projects, administered by the IRF (RPU's and SRS); and,
 - c. attempts to persuade Congress to appropriate more funds for RTCF.
7. The Web site, established in conjunction with the IRF (at new address <http://www.rhinos-irf.org>), has continued to evolve and now has an operational listserv to facilitate communication among various rhino constituencies, including the RAG.
8. 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 Rhinos.
9. 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.

Special concerns

The conservation crisis for rhinoceros continues. There has been improvement on a number of fronts but continuing challenges on others.

In Africa, most of the news is good. The southern white rhinos have continued to increase and now are estimated at 8,400. Numbers of black rhinos have continued their recovery and numbers are now estimated at 2,600, a 13 percent increase over their low point of 2,300 earlier in the decade. Nevertheless, the poaching threat is still serious. The bad news is the situation for northern white rhinos remains precarious with only 25 rhinos surviving. Infrastructure and operations for protection in Garamba National Park are gradually recovering, but major changes in the program are occurring. A workshop to develop further plans and new mechanisms and partnerships for conservation of the northern white rhino will occur in August 1998. The RAG and IRF will continue to assist as need and funds permit.

In Asia, the Sumatran rhino, with fewer than 400 individuals, remains under intense poaching pressure although the rhino protection units (RPU's) formed with IRF and the IUCN/SSC Asian Rhino Specialist Group (AsRSG), seem to be ameliorating the situation. The American Association of Zoo Keepers (AAZK) is providing funds to help support the RPU's. The managed breeding programs for Sumatran rhinos at facilities in native habitat in Indonesia (Way Kambas National Park), Peninsula Malaysia (Sungai Dusun) and Sabah (Sepilok) continue.

Three rhinos (a male and two females) from zoos in the United Kingdom and Indonesia have returned to the managed breeding facility at Way Kambas. RPU's also are being established this year for Javan rhinos in Ujung Kulon, Indonesia. AZA institutions, with and through the IRF, assisted with an intensive census of Javan rhinos in Vietnam in early 1998. Results indicated only five to seven surviving. An action plan is in progress: the RAG and IRF will assist as funds and need permit. Poaching pressure on the third species of Asian rhino (~ 2,000) remains high and the possibility of a major decline remains 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. A demographic imperative also exists for both subspecies of white rhino in AZA institutions. To ameliorate the problem for the southern subspecies, plans are proceeding to acquire 15 to 25 new founders from South Africa, which is providing surplus removed from its national parks, and is receiving support from AZA institutions for *in situ* efforts in rhino conservation.

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. The major new reproductive research program initiated at the Cincinnati Zoo has produced some progress. The younger of the two females there has been pregnant three times in the last year, once for about three months, but she has failed to sustain the pregnancy for unknown reasons. Breeding efforts continue. Concurrently, efforts to develop managed breeding centers in native habitat in both Indonesia and Malaysia have progressed.

Financial report

Balance as of 1 July 1997	\$28.26
Funds raised*	\$100.00
Funds expended*	\$95.00
Balance as of 1 July 1998	\$33.26

* Much of the RAG's activities relative to *in situ* programs and research projects is in partnership with the IRF, which from September 1997 to September 1998 was providing and/or administering approximately \$750,000 for rhino conservation. As a consequence, the RAG has discontinued its separate fund.

Short-term goals for upcoming year

1. Continue with implementation 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.
3. Continue to increase support, through IRF, of programs for *in situ* conservation of rhinos.
4. Facilitate additional exchanges of rhinos between SSP and other regional rhino breeding programs as well as managed populations in the wild.
5. Contribute to improvement of the SSP program for Sumatran rhinos.
6. Implement AZA-mandated changes in structure and function of taxon advisory groups.