

Research chimps to be sent to US sanctuary

January 23 2013, by Janet McConnaughey

(AP)—All but about 50 of hundreds of research chimpanzees belonging to the National Institutes of Health should be retired to the national sanctuary in northwest Louisiana, and all of them should have plenty of room to play and climb, an NIH committee recommended Tuesday.

The NIH Council of Councils Working Group approved the proposal, which also calls for major cuts in grants to study chimps in laboratories and no return to breeding the great apes for research.

The federal agency said in 2011 that it would phase out most invasive research on [chimpanzees](#). The new 86-page recommendation describes how chimpanzees should be kept and what will be needed for any future research. Chimps should be used only if there is no other way to study a threat to [human health](#), and the research should be approved by an independent committee with members from the public, said the Council of Councils proposal, which will be sent to the NIH's director after a 60-day public-comment period.

Animal-rights activists said they were pleased by the recommendations.

"At last, our federal government understands: A chimpanzee should no more live in a laboratory than a human should live in a phone booth," the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals said in a statement.

Kathleen Conlee, vice president for animal research issues at the Humane Society of the United States, said her organization is urging the NIH to implement the recommendations and to consult immediately with

sanctuaries on how best to retire the animals.

"The report made it very clear that the federal sanctuary system is the most appropriate place for these animals to go," she said.

Conlee said she was disappointed by the recommendation that the NIH hold onto a group of about 50 chimps in case further research on the animals is approved.

"But I'm glad they made clear those animals should be kept to much higher standards than they are currently being kept in," she said.

Chimpanzees should be kept in groups of at least seven, with about 1,000 square feet (93 square meters) of outdoor space per chimp—roughly one-sixth of an acre for a group of seven, the committee recommended.

The space must include year-round outdoor access with a variety of natural surfaces such as grass, dirt and mulch, and enough climbing space to let all members of large troupes travel, feed and rest well above the ground. It must also include material to let them build new nests each day, the report said.

At Chimp Haven, the national sanctuary for retired research chimpanzees in northwest Louisiana, enclosures range from a quarter-acre to five acres, (0.10 to 2 hectares) some of them forested and all with climbing structures.

"Since our mission is to care for retired chimpanzees, this is encouraging news to us," Chimp Haven spokeswoman Karen Allen said of the committee's recommendation that the chimps be relocated to the sanctuary.

A \$30 million cap on total spending for construction and care of Chimp Haven's retired primates is looming. That would stop NIH from contributing 75 percent of the \$13,000 annual cost to care for each federal chimpanzee.

Conlee said the Humane Society will urge Congress to move money now spent on research contracts to Chimp Haven's facility in Keithville. The sanctuary gives the animals better care for less money than the labs are paid, she said.

"So the [chimps](#) will be able to live a life free from harm, and the taxpayers will win as well," she said.

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Citation: Research chimps to be sent to US sanctuary (2013, January 23) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-01-chimps-sanctuary.html>

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