

Group wants to stop elephants' move from one zoo to another (Update)

April 3 2015



In this Feb. 27, 2015 file photo, Woodland Park Zoo's elephants Bamboo and Chai are shown in their enclosure at Woodland Park Zoo in in Seattle. The Elephant Justice Project is seeking a preliminary injunction at a Friday, April 3, 2015 hearing to prevent the elephants from being moved to a zoo in Oklahoma City. (AP Photo/seattlepi.com, Joshua Trujillo, file)

Animal welfare activists who want two elephants at a Seattle zoo sent to a wildlife sanctuary are seeking to block the animals' transfer to another zoo in Oklahoma City, arguing that putting them in zoos is inhumane.

The Elephant Justice Project is seeking a preliminary injunction at a hearing on Friday to prevent the animals from being moved until their lawsuit is heard.

The legal action is part of the broader debate about whether housing elephants in zoos is humane, with activists arguing the large animals need more space to roam than zoos can provide.

In a lawsuit filed in King County Superior Court, the group says that Seattle didn't have the authority to give away the Woodland Park Zoo's endangered Asian elephants, Bamboo and Chai.

The zoo disputes that assertion and also says the transfer gives the pair more space and allows them to be part of a larger, multigenerational herd. The zoo has said it considered a number of U.S. zoos with Asian elephants before deciding the Oklahoma City Zoo was the best choice.

In court documents filed last week, the zoo's attorneys urged the court to deny the preliminary injunction, saying any delay could jeopardize the ability to transport the elephants during the best spring weather when it's not too hot or cold for the animals.

The Seattle City Council passed an ordinance in December 2001 transferring the management and ownership of the zoo to the nonprofit Woodland Park Zoological Society. The city acted within its authority, and the agreement with the zoo did not violate any state law, the zoo's attorneys said.

Alyne Fortgang, co-founder of the Elephant Justice Project, said in a statement Friday that if the group prevails in its lawsuit, the city will be forced to "act on behalf of these long-suffering elephants by sending them to a sanctuary."

Seattle Mayor Ed Murray and a majority of the Seattle City Council had asked that the zoo consider sending the elephants to a sanctuary—or a home where they would have more space per animal and live in a warmer climate.

The mayor's spokesman has said Murray is disappointed in the decision to move the elephants but adds that it's the zoo's choice to determine whether the animals go.

The zoo estimates it will cost \$111,000 to ship the two elephants in climate-controlled crates on the back of a flatbed tractor-trailer for the 2,000-mile journey. The elephants are on a long-term loan, and no money will be exchanged between the zoos.

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