

NATIONAL ZOOLOGICAL PARK
SEAL AND SEA LION SUPPORT FACILITY AND EXHIBIT RENEWAL

3001 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C.

Submitted by the Smithsonian Institution

Delegated Action of the Executive Director

December 31, 2008

Pursuant to delegations of authority adopted by the Commission on October 3, 1996 and 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d), I comment favorably on the concept plans for the renovation and construction of the Seal and Sea Lion Support Facility and Exhibit at the National Zoo in Washington, D.C., as shown on NCPC Map File No. 2.00(78.00)42667.

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The Smithsonian Institution has submitted concept design plans for renovating and improving the Seal and Sea Lion Exhibit at the National Zoo. The submitted plans are consistent with the new master plan approved by the Commission in November 2008. Total new construction is less than 5,500 square feet. With all renovations, the total building space improvements include 12,300 square feet.

The Seal and Sea Lion Facility is located at the approximate mid-point of Beaver Valley within the National Zoo, where the two steep hillsides that form the valley curve toward the south. The Zoo's 1973 National Register of Historic Places nomination cites the "rugged and green magnificence" of the hilly Rock Creek Park site as a character-defining aspect of the Zoo landscape. This rugged terrain directly influences the landscape and building design at the Seal and Sea Lion site.

Upgrades being implemented in the design of the exhibition area include the following:

- Life support systems and equipment will be replaced to provide better control of water chemistry and respond to a variety of water quality issues while improving efficiency in energy and water use.
- Animal areas will be improved to bring the facility up to current best practices for (12) pinnipeds and (5) pelicans, including private holding areas, and exhibit habitats that are more varied, dynamic, and realistic.
- Accessibility for persons with disabilities will be improved in staff work spaces and throughout the public areas to help visitors navigate the site's hilly terrain.
- Visitor areas will be redesigned to encourage visitors to witness the animals from a variety of perspectives, within a context that evokes the animals' native habitats.
- Plantings, waves, and realistic rockwork will be used to renew exhibit areas to present a more accurate depiction of the animals and their relationship within their native environment.
- Sustainable best practices will be used throughout the project construction and site development.

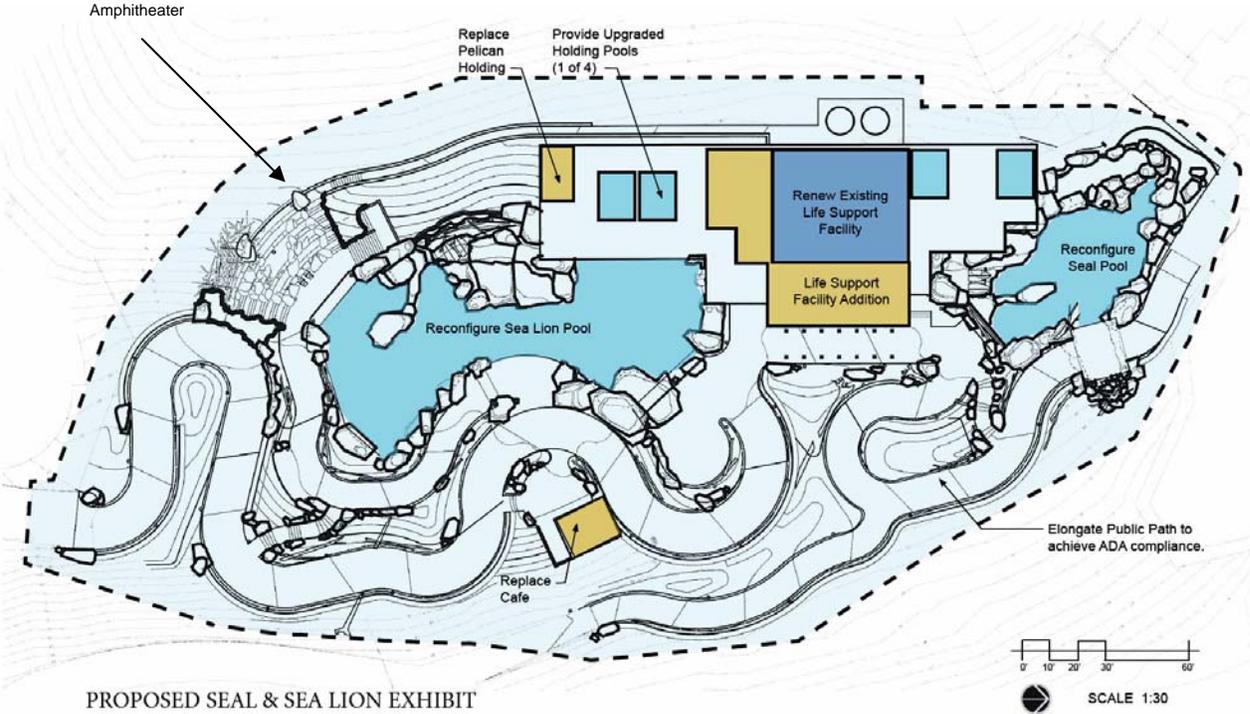
The main support building will be visible up, down, and across Beaver Valley. In response, it is designed to associate with the larger landscape through the use of traditional forms and a material palette indicative of west coast environs where seals and seal lions are associated with rugged and rocky surroundings. The support building architecture is an assemblage of shed-roofed forms that nestles into the western slope of the Zoo. The design's incorporation of these multiple shed roofs speaks to the working identity of the structure, and recalls traditional forms found in the coastal environments. Most of the building area is dedicated to life support systems equipment. While providing a more adaptable and robust means to maintain water quality for the animals, the new life support systems will also benefit the environment through substantial energy and water conservation. Natural light, distinct conditioning zones for people and equipment spaces, and re-circulating water are among the energy-saving features for this LEED-certified building.

No increase or change in staffing for the proposed facility. As noted, the project adheres to all elements of the previously approved November 2008 master plan in its land use plan, circulation design, sustainability objectives, and environmental effects.

The Smithsonian Institution has worked with the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer (DC-SHPO) in reviewing initial concept designs and has modified the submitted concept plans in response to DC-SHPO input. In accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the DC-SHPO will continue to review the project and the applicant will undertake preparation of a Memorandum of Agreement on conditions to avoid, minimize, or mitigate project design effects that constitute an adverse effect upon the eligible historic district and individual resources of the National Zoo. Preliminary consultation with review agencies, and the formal initiation of the Section 106 process for this project was begun by the Smithsonian Institution in October 2008. Further consultation with the DC-SHPO and consulting parties will be occurring in the subsequent design phases of the project.

The Coordinating Committee reviewed the project on December 17, 2008, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all

agencies represented. The participating agencies were: NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the District Department of Transportation; the Fire Department; the Department of Housing and Community Development; the General Services Administration; the National Park Service; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.



PROPOSED SEAL & SEA LION EXHIBIT



VIEW OF SEAL AND SEA LION EXHIBIT BUILDING AS SEEN FROM SOUTHEAST ON UPPER SLOPES LEADING TO OLMSTEAD WALK



VIEW OF SEAL AND SEA LION EXHIBIT BUILDING RENOVATION AS SEEN FROM SOUTH POOL AND OUTDOOR AMPHITHEATER

The Commission of Fine Arts reviewed and approved the project concept design on November 20, 2008.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), the Smithsonian Institution prepared a National Zoo Master Plan Environmental Assessment in July 2008. The project is fully described in the Plan and the related Environmental Assessment (EA). The EA resulted in a Finding of No Significant Impact for the Plan by the Executive Director on October 31, 2008. This project in all respects conforms to the Zoo Master Plan and establishes no conditions outside of the EA analysis resulting in any additional issues or impacts. Staff has further reviewed the project relative to the EA and FONSI and has determined all mitigation measures to be addressed by the project design are developed in the submitted plans.

Marcel C. Acosta
Executive Director