**2024 Assessment Review - Lucy’s Edmonton Advocates Project**

Once again, the Edmonton Valley Zoo (EVZ) has brought in “Independent experts” closely affiliated with zoo and circus industries, for Lucy’s annual assessment. This assessment is required to obtain the variance from the Canadian Associations of Zoos and Aquariums (CAZA standards) since a lone elephant is a violation of the zoo industry elephant social grouping clause.

The exception to the rule of industry experts was in 2022, when two sanctuary experts were invited to perform Lucy’s assessments. Not surprisingly, while acknowledging some health issues, they recommended that Lucy to be readied for transfer to sanctuary. Not surprisingly their views were rejected by the zoo. But the 2024 reports, while flawed, do support the case that Lucy is an overall healthy elephant who can be prepared in 2025 for transport to sanctuary.

**Background of the 2024 Consultants**  
  
Dennis Schmitt DVM – Reproductive Resources

• May 2014– present

Missouri State University, William H. Darr School of Agriculture Springfield, United States

Position: Professor Emeritus

• August 2006 - present

Ringling Bros. Center for Elephant Conservation

Position: Chair of Veterinary Care and Director of Research and Conservation

Daryl Hoffman

• Executive Director of the Elephant Manager’s Association

• Zookeeper and manager for more than 30 years

• Curator of large mammals at the Houston Zoo for 16 years

• vice president of Living Collections at the Pittsburgh Zoo

**Positive points from the reports**

• Dr. Schmitt reported that *“Lucy****is a healthy active****geriatric 49-year-old female Asian elephant”.* Mr. Hoffman states *“Lucy looks to be in good physical condition especially given her age. While she is within her target weight range, she is at the upper end. She looks good and does not look obese.”*

Both Sr. Schmidt and Mr, Huffman agree Lucy is in good physical condition, noting her current weight being within normal limits, certainly an improvement from the years when she was as much as 1500 lbs overweight.

**Mr. Huffman goes further to state that Lucy could survive a move.*“But if the sole purpose to move her is companionship, I would question this. Could she survive a move?  Probably*.”**

Companionship is only one reason to relocate Lucy to sanctuary, even more significant is northern climate, lack of appropriate space and unnatural conditions that Lucy endures at the Edmonton zoo.

**Significant misleading point from the reports**

Dr. Schmitt is a reproductive specialist, perhaps why his introductory discussion of her history focuses on Lucy’s reproductive system and mammary health, not relevant to the evaluation. He then discusses risk of EEHV, a captivity-related virus that has never to been known to affect any elephant over the age of 1***8. “Since Lucy has not been around other Asian elephants for many years and it should be assumed that her antibody levels to EEHV 1a and 1b are very low or they are not measurable.”***

However, a claim that Lucy would be at risk if exposed to other Asian elephants in a North American sanctuary is unsupported by any industry documentation. She is simply too old. Elephant Endotheliotropic Herpesvirus (EEHV) is a DNA virus that causes acute, fatal haemorrhagic disease in captive and to a lesser extent in wild juvenile Asian and African elephants, from 0 to 18 years old, and majority are under age 4.

**Other notable points in these examinations:**

***“Lucy is provided adequate space and a sand mound to lie down and rise on her own. Lucy is herd bound to the elephant staff who provide her social and behavioral choices to her benefit. Lucy primarily mouth breathes rather than primarily through her trunk. On exercise, last year, it was determined using blood gases that it results in higher CO2 levels than normal and lower O2 levels.”***

**Comment**

• In 2022, Lucy’s oxygen levels were measured at 92% by pulse oximetry which is within normal limits. It seems this reproductive specialist also mistakenly believes like his predecessor Dr. Goeritz, that measuring oxygen levels from a vein is an accurate way to measure oxygenation, it is not.

• Mouth breathing is insignificant providing oxygenation is adequate, as stated by Dr. Susan Mikota in her book Biology, Medicine and Surgery of Elephants.

• Lucy has an attachment to her keepers but “herd bound to her keepers” — this claim has long been debunked by observation of lone elephants’ arrival and behaviours at sanctuary.

• *“Lucy is given choice and control in her daily activities”.* As noted by Dr. Patricia London and Ingo Schmidinger in their 2022 assessment, Lucy is tightly controlled with no autonomy,  to the point that she cannot choose even where to urinate and defecate.

***“Lucy is an active healthy older elephant and is considered Geriatric at 49 years of age. She did not exhibit any pain or reluctance to walk a good distance either uphill or downhill. The left front leg does appear to be slightly enlarged below the elbow. The right foot has 2 healing lesions under adequate veterinary supervision”***

**Comment**

• Since Lucy is active and healthy then she should be quite capable of being transported to sanctuary.

• At 49 years of age, Lucy is not geriatric.

• In videos we have recorded and seen of Lucy walking downhill, she was struggling and has been this way for years. She appeared apprehensive to go down a slope presumably due to her long-standing arthritis.

***“There was evidence of a small lesion consistent with leiomyoma at the area of cervical fornix about 1.5 cms in diameter…..The tip of the right uterine horn had two 2 cm structures consistent with leiomyomas.”***

**Comment**

• Lucy’s uterine tumour has shrunk significantly following the treatment that was instituted after the 2022 consultations. The consultants had easily diagnosed a benign uterine tumour that was estimated to be 70 lbs.

***“I recommend that she continue to remain in her current facility until she passes, which could be several more years.”***

**Comment**

• If she is healthy as stated and can survive for several more years at the zoo, even with substandard living conditions, this suggests that retiring to sanctuary could allow her even more years of quality of life.

**Discussion of Exhibit/facility Design:**

***“Indoor housing for Lucy was clean and in good condition but limiting in overall space to move around.****”*

***“A pool large enough to completely submerge is lacking and would be a great benefit to her****.****The ability to fully submerge and take weight off her feet would be an improvement to Lucy’s welfare.”***

***“The weather in Edmonton can result in days where Lucy does not get to go outside, and the limited indoor space is a concern on these days****.****I understand the zoo is working on barn and yard expansions and modifications.”***

**Comment**

The zoo has been promising and “working’ on modifications for 10 years, it is the standard response to consultant recommendations, but very few have materialized.

**Discussion on Training and Enrichment:**

***“Part of my visit was to share my thoughts on transitioning Lucy to a strictly protected contact form of management. Lucy is already trained in protected contact so the transition would not be difficult or stressful on Lucy*. “**

**Comment**

• She has been managed with free contact with bullhooks as a means of control for 47 years. Both consultants are from the U.S. where the use of bullhooks in AZA accredited zoos is banned. All zoos use the protected contact management model to ensure the safety of the staff and public. We have raised this issue for many years with the zoo, it has never happened and is unlikely to now, change would require purposed enclosures the zoo does not have, but the sanctuary does have.

**LEAP Position**

Two decades ago, when the EVZ management decided it was unwilling to retire Lucy to sanctuary, her enclosure should have been upgraded. A pool should have been available, and both indoor and outdoor spaces should have been significantly expanded. It should not have required a formal complaint to institute rubberized flooring and an exercise tent, basic needs for a captive zoo elephant.

Protected contact should have been instituted long ago for the safety of the staff and visitors. We believe this wasn’t done because of the cost associated with building her a new much larger enclosure with shift areas to allow for access for treatment and feeding.

We have had concerns about her medical management over the past decade. If there had been qualified species experts managing Lucy, she would have  avoided the suffering  associated with obesity, poor diet, no access to browse and no access to expert medical care such as a sanctuary provides. A uterine tumour was able to grow to 70 pounds, but easily found by a team of international experts two years ago with a simple ultrasound and was also easy treated.  While her foot management and diet have improved in recent years, it took over four decades for that to happen. With respiratory issues, the quality of air she breathes, and inspection of ventilation systems, should have been a priority, and she should not have been allowed to paint. The list goes on.

The City of Edmonton could not find a qualified zoo director during a search for a new director, and in the end pulled a marketing/sales manager from its ranks. His contribution to the spin on Lucy’s quality of life is to ask us to believe there are hills and ponds, a sanctuary-like setting, beyond public view, where she spends her days. The reality is, as Maclean’s magazine stated all those years ago to our collective shame. “Can we justify the suffering of captive animals? Canada still has slums and some of the worst are at our zoos. Lucy, the solitary elephant at the Edmonton zoo…lives in a mental and physical slum. “

**In Conclusion**

**LEAP has long called for independent of industry evaluation of Lucy’s ability to be retired to the Tennessee Elephant Sanctuary (TES). The zoo has continued to bring in zoo-associated DVMs , with only one exception. In the last two years three experts have said she can be prepared and crate-trained to make the trip, accompanied by her EVZ keepers.  She is an overall healthy zoo elephant who is likely to live for several more years. There is no longer need for further evaluation. The Edmonton zoo should initiate the process of collaborating with sanctuary experts to ensure Lucy is at TES before the winter of 2025.**