

# Idee für einen gemeinsamen Kompensationsfonds der Zoos und Aquarien: The Zoos & Aquaria Care Fund



Im Rahmen der abschliessenden Diskussion entwickelte CASPAR BIJLEVELD die Idee, dass CO<sub>2</sub>-Emissionen, die nicht verhindert oder reduziert werden können, über einen gemeinsamen Fonds der Zoos und Aquarien, den "Zoos & Aquaria CARE Fund", dadurch kompensiert werden könnten, dass Mittel für ein gemeinsames Programm zur Erhaltung der tropischen Wälder zur Verfügung gestellt werden. Dieses Programm wäre als Ergänzung, nicht als Ersatz für die Anstrengungen, CO<sub>2</sub> Emissionen zu reduzieren, zu sehen. Präsident und Geschäftsführer von WAZA nahmen die Idee wohlwollend auf. In der Folge entwickelte BIJLEVELD ein detailliertes Konzept, das vorab den Teilnehmern an der 67. Jahrestagung von WAZA in Melbourne vorgestellt werden soll, das sich aber an alle Zoos und Zoo-Organisationen richtet. Nachfolgend das an WAZA übermittelte Dokument in der Originalsprache Englisch.

## The ZOOS & AQUARIA CARE FUND

**A new holistic approach to compensate carbon emissions by effectively conserving tropical forests**

Detailed concept paper for all zoos and aquaria worldwide  
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*Note to readers: please forward widely within your zoo and aquaria networks. Please send any questions, comments, or expressions of interest to the author at:*

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### Foreword

The 2012 RIGI-Symposium organized by zooschweiz, the Swiss association of scientifically-run zoos, focused on zoos and sustainability. Topics centred around energy use, resource efficiency and, of course, CO<sub>2</sub>. During the ensuing discussions about whether to compensate CO<sub>2</sub> and if so, how and where, an innovative idea emerged: why do zoos worldwide not unite their efforts in compensating their carbon, and help protect additional tropical forests, without going through intermediaries and complicated schemes, with sometimes unclear results?

The author was asked to prepare an initial short presentation, to be sent to WAZA members. This met with interest, and the council of WAZA asked for a more detailed project proposal, which is the subject of this paper. It outlines the creation of the *Zoos & Aquaria CARE Fund*, which stands for Zoos and Aquaria worldwide Compensate to Avoid and Reduce Emissions by making possible the creation or enlargement of protected forest areas in the tropics. It has taken into account the initial comments by WAZA members.

It was agreed at the RIGI-Symposium that WAZA should help coordinate the *Zoos & Aquaria CARE Fund* in its initial stages.

The Fund itself, however, is to remain fully independent, with representatives in its board from all major zoo associations. This is to ensure neutrality and impartiality, in order to make sure that individual zoos/aquaria and zoo/aquaria associations worldwide can embrace the fund as their own compensation programme.

Finally, the potential success of the project lies in its simplicity, which is the key to ensuring worldwide adherence and participation by zoos and aquaria. Also, keeping costs at their strict minimum will ensure that almost every dollar paid into the fund effectively ends up in the field, where it is needed.



Dry forest at Shipstern Nature Reserve, Northern Belize © C. Bijleveld

### Preamble: the future of tropical forests

The conservation of tropical forests is one of the world's most prominent issues and has been in discussion for over five decades. However, despite many efforts, conferences and goodwill, it is quite clear that the situation has only worsened over the years: primary tropical forests are now becoming very rare in



most parts of the world, and so are large contiguous tracts of tropical forest cover. The pace of deforestation in Asia and Africa has drastically risen, especially with the boom in palm oil production. Although the rate of deforestation has abated somewhat in the Brazilian Amazon (to the expense of other forest areas such as the Chaco further south), overall the situation in Latin America, especially Central America, is also alarming.



Destruction of forest in northern Belize, 2011 © C. Bijleveld

For the past two decades CO<sub>2</sub>, greenhouse gases and climate change have been much discussed. It is universally agreed that today, burning and degrading forests represent 20% of all of humanity's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. It seems evident that in trying to curb climate change, the highest priority should be to stop this process and protect forest areas that are still standing – helping also to stop habitat and biodiversity loss, topics that are often overshadowed in the climate change debate. REDD currently tries to address the issue, but is struggling to move ahead on the rapid time scale that we need to save the last tropical forests.

Finally, an important fact needs to be looked into the face. At the current pace, which does not show signs of relenting, any forest not under some form of protection will have disappeared within the next few decades. Since zoos will continue to emit CO<sub>2</sub> in the future (despite efforts to reduce emissions within their facilities - a priority that should by all means run in parallel to compensating emissions), this project offers a unique opportunity to act all together and make a real difference. By compensating the CO<sub>2</sub> they emit, zoos will help enlarge tropical forest protected areas, and thus ensure that at least some significant tracts of this critical heritage remain for the future.

## How will the Fund work?

The *Zoos & Aquaria CARE Fund*, in its endeavour to remain a simple but entirely traceable project, is to function as a Voluntary Carbon Offset scheme, but exclusively for Zoos and Aquaria. In short, Zoos and Aquaria estimate their carbon emissions according to a common tool, the Common Carbon Emission Estimator described below. Zoos and Aquaria then compensate the estimated amount of tons into the fund, at a \$/ton price determined by the *Zoos & Aquaria CARE Fund* as financially sustainable for zoos, while being credible compared to prices in the voluntary carbon offset market.

Conservation institutions (national/international NGOs, na-

tional parks, private protected areas, community development projects, etc.) which are located or have projects located in tropical forest areas can apply for grants for the purchase of additional forest lands in order to enlarge protected areas or to reforest (with endemic species) buffer zones around protected areas.

## The Zoos & Aquaria CARE Fund: set-up

Worldwide, Zoos and Aquaria are extremely diverse in their essence, goal and relations with the rest of the world. Most are members of an Association, be it on the national, regional or global level, but most are not members at all of these levels. In order to ensure maximum adherence and minimal conflicts, it is proposed that the *Zoos & Aquaria CARE Fund* be legally structured as an independent neutral foundation.

The board of the foundation will be composed of representatives of all major zoo and aquaria associations of the world, as well as members of the conservation community active and experienced in tropical forest conservation *in situ*. All board members will participate on a voluntary basis.

The *Zoos & Aquaria CARE Fund* is to be a very simple set-up, e.g. a non-profit foundation under Swiss law. Its first decision will be to decide how the practical aspects and administrative duties (collection and preliminary analysis of proposals, organization of annual board meeting, evaluation of ongoing projects, reporting to members, etc.) will be carried out, for instance by a dedicated employee or 'outsourced' to a separate specialist organisation. The Board will also agree on the core principles of the use of funds. Based on feedback received from zoos on the first concept note, those key principles should ensure that *Zoos & Aquaria CARE Fund*:

- Are solely devoted to the purchase of additional tropical forest or lands to be reforested;
- Prove effective forest protection;
- Guarantee that the subsequent protection of additional forest is ensured;
- Guarantee that the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent is respected and that local land rights, especially those of indigenous peoples, are respected, and
- Grantees accept to report for a duration of ten years.

The Board will decide on the priorities of the Fund each year and take into account suggestions from participating zoos. One suggestion made in response to the first concept note, for instance, is to aim to have at least one project per year in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Zoos might also wish for the Fund to prioritize new land acquisitions near National Parks or Private Reserves which they are already involved in protecting.

The Board of the *Zoos & Aquaria CARE Fund* will meet on an annual basis at the most convenient location, in order to decide on the annual allocation of funds and evaluate existing projects.



The Board will send to all Zoo Associations and participating zoos a concise but very precise annual report stating and mapping every project that has been supported by the *Zoos & Aquaria CARE Fund* as well as an overview of the success of previously-supported projects. The report will also be delivered in the form of an electronic poster to be used by members for public relation purposes.

### Why not use the Voluntary Carbon Offset market?

In response to the first concept note, a few zoos queried whether or not the carbon emissions could be formally verified under, for example, the Voluntary Carbon Standards (VCS). The originators of the *Zoos & Aquaria CARE Fund*, however, feel that going through the voluntary carbon market is not optimal for a few reasons:

- Compensation within the Fund may never exactly match actual emissions with avoided emissions in terms of tonnage. Because opportunities to purchase land vary in time and price, the Fund might wish to spend more money per hectare in one year (and thus avoid fewer carbon emissions) and less money per hectare in another year. Focusing on matching the exact amount of emissions to specific verified offsets would reduce the flexibility of the Fund.
- The costs of verification, project development, and auditing can add up to as much as \$1/ton – money that would clearly be better used for conservation in the field.
- Many NGOs criticize the concept of carbon offsets as green-washing. By setting up a closed fund open only to Zoos and Aquaria and focusing on symbolic ‘compensation’ donations that directly protect standing forests without trying to link exact emissions to exact ‘offsets’ via a verification scheme, the *Zoos & Aquaria CARE Fund* hopes to avoid controversy while ensuring that more funds go directly to saving tropical forests.

Nevertheless, transparency of financing and quality of projects will be paramount. It can be reasonably assumed that all zoos and aquaria will wish to see their compensation dollars invested in an effort to avoid further deforestation (and the release of CO<sub>2</sub>) and, foremost, help conserve tropical forests and their richness in flora and fauna. It thus makes sense for zoos worldwide to compensate into a scheme where there is:

- full control on how funds are allocated and spent, and
- full transparency and tangible results, which can be swiftly and efficiently shown and demonstrated when needed, be it to authorities or the general public.

Zoos which desire or are required to have carbon offsets verified by a third party can do so through other schemes, for instance the Verified Carbon Standard’s new REDD+ verification system. If in the future enough zoos do want or are required to have third-party verification, the Board could decide to require at least one third-party verified option per year.

## The Common Carbon Emission Estimator

Participants in the Rigi-Symposium decided to develop an emission calculator specifically for Zoos, which for the benefit of this paper has been named the Common Carbon Emission Estimator (CCEE). The calculator is based on various systems and is holistic in its approach, including all resources consumed on site, as well as third-party emissions linked to Zoo visits. The Board of the *Zoos & Aquaria CARE Fund* will have to define whether the CCEE should, in its final form, include all emissions, or rather a simplified version of it (based, for example, on emissions created by heating and electricity only). The elements included in the CCEE are outlined in the table below.

### Example of CO<sub>2</sub> calculation and preliminary financial estimate

Preliminary calculations using the CCEE were made for the Papiliorama Foundation in Switzerland. This medium-sized institution consists of three large tropical domes and other annexes, and may not represent the typical zoo. Ideally, zoos willing to participate should fill in their CCEE once it is finalized, which will allow for a much better overview. This will help the board of the *Zoos & Aquaria CARE Fund* to set a price per ton that is financially sustainable for zoos, while also being credible when compared to other voluntary carbon offset programmes. Taking a price of 3 US\$ per ton per year, which is a price consistent with several projects identified in the Stern review and various REDD studies (although on the low end). In the case of the Papiliorama Foundation this would add up to an annual contribution of 4500 US\$, about 0.1% of its annual budget and a sum reasonable enough that it can be included without hesitation.

Based on these preliminary figures, let us assume that about 200 zoos (out of approximately one thousand worldwide) join the Fund at an average of 5,000 US\$ per annum. This would amount to 1’000’000 US\$ available annually for the expansion of tropical forest conservation areas in the tropics.

### Zoos & Aquaria CARE Fund initial and ongoing budgets

The *Zoos & Aquaria CARE Fund* will need an initial capital investment of ca 10,000 US\$ in order to form a not-for-profit foundation under Swiss law. If approximately 20-30 zoos join in the initial stage, it is reasonable to assume that the first year of compensation will be invested in setting up the NGO and securing the operational basis for the Fund (either through a direct employee or a third-party NGO manager, for instance WAZA, World Land Trust, or another group identified by the Board). After this initial stage, the *Zoos & Aquaria CARE Fund* should be able to function with minimal overheads, ideally no more than 5% of donations.



## Proposed Next Steps

1. If WAZA and major Zoo Associations remain interested in the concept after discussing this proposal at the October WAZA meeting, each major Zoo Association should nominate a member to serve on the inaugural Board of the *Zoos & Aquaria CARE Fund*. These members will be responsible for setting up the Foundation and drafting the first principles and constitution, in consultation with their members. Nominees should be active in field conservation and have links with local NGOs managing conservation

areas in tropical forests.

2. Each major Zoo Association invests a small contribution towards the creation of the *Zoos & Aquaria CARE Fund*.
3. Creation of the *Zoos & Aquaria CARE Fund* by the inaugural Board.
4. Set-up of operations.

**The author will be glad to implement the first three steps mentioned above and help coordinate the initial stages of the fourth step.**

