

**Review by the NIH Veterinary Panel of Animals for which Relocation is not Recommended by the
Southwest National Primate Research Center Attending Veterinarian
December 7, 2021**

**The panel met with James M. Anderson, M.D., Ph.D., Director, and Robin Kawazoe, Deputy Director,
Division of Program Coordination, Planning and Strategic Initiatives (OD/NIH)¹**

Background

The NIH Veterinary Panel (Panel) was formed after NIH's acceptance with modifications, of a recommendation from the Council of Councils (Council), following a [Council Working Group on Assessing the Safety of Relocating At-Risk Chimpanzees](#). The Panel works independently of any NIH program, external stakeholder groups or organizations, and sites holding chimpanzees.

At-risk chimpanzees were defined in the [Council report](#) as those animals that are more likely than not to experience one or more severe adverse events because of the relocation and integration process. Severe adverse events include permanent or serious injury, long-term destabilization, or death within 6 months of arriving at the receiving facility (a timepoint based on the duration of the post-trip adjustment phase and the additional time for follow-up). Recommendation 6, as accepted by NIH was, "When either the sending or receiving facility recommends not to relocate a chimpanzee, independent expert veterinary opinion should be sought to inform the relocation decision."

NIH implemented this recommendation by establishing a panel of three NIH veterinarians from the NIH intramural research program with expertise in chimpanzees or other nonhuman primate veterinary medicine, but who are independent from the NIH Chimpanzee Management Program. The Panel was charged to review the records of the chimpanzees under consideration for relocation, discuss with the sending Attending Veterinarian his/her rationale for not signing the health certificate necessary for transfer, and consult with other veterinary specialists who have examined the animals, and if needed, to examine the chimpanzees.

As of October 1, 2021, there were a total of 105 NIH-owned or -supported chimpanzees located at the three non-sanctuary facilities: the Alamogordo Primate Facility (APF) in New Mexico, the Keeling Center for Comparative Medicine and Research (KCCMR) in Texas, and the Southwest National Primate Research Center (SNPRC) in Texas. This summary reflects discussions during a meeting focused on the NIH-supported chimpanzees at the SNPRC.

Purpose of the Meeting

The purpose of the meeting was two-fold:

- 1) To develop a full understanding of the process followed by the Panel members in reviewing and deciding which chimpanzees could or could not be moved from SNPRC to the federal sanctuary operated by Chimp Haven; and

¹ This meeting was also attended by Robert W. Eisinger, Ph.D., Senior Scientific Advisor, Division of Program Coordination, Planning, and Strategic Initiatives, OD/NIH.

- 2) To ascertain whether the Panel operated independently of any other Federal staff, received sufficient information such that they felt fully informed about their decisions, received requested medical and behavioral records about each chimpanzee, and followed a protocol in conducting their reviews leading up to their decisions.

Review Context and Process

The Panel noted that they conducted their review from the perspective that the chimpanzees should be transferred to the Sanctuary unless a facility demonstrates that the animals should not be transferred. The members noted that their decisions were based on what is best for the animals. Each panel member was assigned as a lead for the review of each animal, but all members reviewed each animal's records, and they met as a group to discuss their respective reviews. The members stated that their decisions were consensus decisions, i.e., there were no dissenting opinions.

The Panel confirmed that they operated independently of any other Federal staff, received all medical and behavioral records they requested about the chimpanzees at SNPRC, and followed a [written protocol](#) for conducting their reviews. Their determinations are based on the review of the medical and behavioral records of each chimpanzee. As explained in the protocol, the Panel members were told that they could visit the facility if such a visit was needed for their review. Based on the information provided about each chimpanzee and its social group, the Panel did not request an in-person visit to the facility.

The Panel shared several documents which summarize their reviews:

- 1) A spreadsheet organized by social groups. The Panel indicated that they reviewed each animal at SNPRC individually, and then reviewed the animals as members of social groups. The social groups were identified for the Panel by SNPRC. The spreadsheet includes information on social group, duration of social history, and medical information, e.g., age, anesthetic risk, behavioral problems, cardiac disease, and osteoarthritis.
- 2) One-page summaries of their review of each animal at SNPRC. Each summary contains date of birth, assigned animal number, sex, a statement about each animal, and a summary of the Panel's detailed review and whether and why the animal could be moved or not.

The Panel reviewed the records about each animal, and not just its health categorization.² While they said that they considered the Categorization Framework developed by the Council of Councils Working Group, they did not depend on it for their decision-making, remarking that it lacked specificity. The Panel members stated that most of the chimpanzees at SNPRC have substantial health issues, and some of the animals have significant behavior issues. The Panel determined that transfer of the animals with substantial health problems would accelerate their deterioration, and indicated that their determination considered the entire process of relocating the chimpanzees, i.e., pre- and post-transport physical exam including administration of anesthesia, transport, quarantine, introduction and integration processes, changes in caretakers and veterinary staff, and adjusting to new surroundings. For those animals that had severe health or behavioral conditions, the Panel does not recommend relocation of those animals because these conditions could cause the animals to die in transport and it was too much of a risk to

² The Panel was not specifically asked to re-classify animals.

move them, or it would be extremely difficult to successfully integrate some of the animals into a new location.

From their previous experience in identifying animals to move or not move to the federal sanctuary, the Panel had spoken to the veterinary and other staff at the federal sanctuary to review the process followed once a chimpanzee arrives at Chimp Haven. Most chimpanzees are anesthetized up to three times during the process of relocation (anesthesia for pre-transport physical, potential anesthesia to move into a transport box, and anesthesia for an exam post-arrival at Chimp Haven).

The Panel noted that NIH Chimpanzee Management Program staff have been exceptionally responsive to their requests for information and scheduling virtual interviews, and that SNPRC shared the chimpanzees' medical and behavioral records and responded to questions in a timely manner.

Determination for SNPRC Chimpanzees

Based on their review of medical and behavioral records, the Panel determined that none of the 11 NIH-supported animals at SNPRC should be relocated to the federal sanctuary at Chimp Haven.

There are two chimpanzees located at SNPRC that are not being moved at this time because they serve as behavioral support for another chimpanzee that is not being moved. If that paired chimpanzee dies, the other chimpanzee will be re-evaluated for potential transfer to Chimp Haven based on their age, health, behavior, social grouping, and environmental needs.