April 10, 2011

Regulatory Analysis and Development
PPD, APHIS, Station 3A-03.8
4700 River Road
Unit 118
Riverdale, MD 20737-1238

Re: “Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza – Interim rule and request for comments”
Docket No. APHIS-2006-0074

Dear Sir or Madam:

The American Association of Zoo Veterinarians (AAZV) is an organization of veterinarians and allied professionals dedicated to the health and well-being of all captive and wild animals. We represent 915 animal health professionals from 34 nations, of which 751 are American zoo animal health and nutrition personnel. In our many professional capacities, AAZV members provide for the care of and perform and participate in research into health and disease in animals and ecosystems in captive and wild environments. It is this expertise that we respectfully offer comments regarding Docket no. APHIS 2006-0074.

Many members of our organization are actively involved in the important mission of conservation, education, and maintenance of genetically viable species, many of which are threatened or endangered. Responsible management and maintenance of genetic diversity often necessitates individual animals be moved from one zoological collection and transported to another, sometimes involving international travel. It is this capability to scientifically and responsibly relocate individual animals that is often essential to the success of national and international efforts to conserve critical species. Without the ability to continue to exchange animals domestically and internationally it is unlikely members of our organization will be able to continue the tremendous progress that has been made through cooperative breeding programs around the world.

While our organization deeply respects and recognizes the preventative measures required to protect the United States from HPAI, and applaud your continued hard work on this topic, we do have some concerns regarding the affect this proposed changes and interim rule may have on our organization being able to continue our work as well. Many of our European counterparts have already vaccinated valuable zoological collection birds with Avian Influenza vaccines in cooperation with their own governmental programs. The proposed interim rule in Docket no. APHIS 2006-0074 part 903.104 paragraph (b) (4) will prohibit international import of any of these valuable birds or egg offspring that have been vaccinated with an Avian Influenza vaccine. However, this should prove no different than non-vaccinated Avian Influenza antibody positive birds. Further confirmative diagnostic testing could be accomplished to determine true infection from exposure, or vaccine, such as virus isolation and/or PCR.
Many of our AZA (Association of zoos and aquariums) facilities already require pre-shipment testing to be performed ensuring no communicable diseases are present. We humbly request consideration of AZA accredited zoos to be able to continue their work of managing genetically valuable populations. We propose that the wording in the document NOT prohibit importation of genetically valuable Zoological birds and their egg off spring, that have been vaccinated for Avian Influenza as defined in the interim rule.

We propose instead for part 903.104, a certificate accompanying the import of genetically valuable Zoological birds (defined as an AZA TAG or SSP recommendation) to an AZA accredited institution in the United States, indicating that confirmatory testing has already been performed on the individual animal of import and determined to be free from HPAI. The rest of the regulations of course still apply so that further diagnostic testing at importers cost can be regulated as a secondary protective course once imported into the United States.

Additionally, if APHIS would like stronger security measures some further suggestions follow. The language of part 93.104 (b) (3) could be strengthened by requesting the import bird(s) must be in isolation (defined as no exposure to wild birds for a period of 30 days) prior to exportation. Additionally, the certificate/ or written regulations could also require that the animal will be housed at an AZA accredited institution and will remain at an AZA accredited institution for the duration of its stay in the United States.

Respectfully,

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