

## Behind the Scenes with the President

August 2008

Dear Friend of the Zoo,

It's no secret that I love the variety of work at the Zoo. You may recall that I previously shared how hard it is to decide what to wear for the day when you're scheduled for a big cat tour in the morning, a noon luncheon at the Broadmoor, followed by an afternoon meeting with the Executive Committee of the Board. The answer seems to be nice clothes and sensible shoes.

Recently I had an opportunity to participate in a field research project in the southern part of Wyoming releasing and counting Wyoming toads, a critically endangered species. If I could name that week it would be *Of Grass and Grasslands*. The early part of the week was spent in waste-high grass tromping around prairie lakes counting toads, followed immediately by a day at The Broadmoor in toe-high grass watching for golf balls at the U.S. Senior Open as a guest of U.S. Bank.

My family often teases me about my habit of turning even the most fun days into a work related learning experience, and I could not help but think about how each of these two programs impact our community and the Zoo.

Early in my career, my focus was on horticulture. It's an understatement to say I have a commitment to the land – and landscape as a whole. Wyoming is particularly interesting to me. More than 90 percent of the state is classified as rural. It also has some of the largest remaining tracts of native grasslands, which is increasingly becoming imperiled. As grassland habitat steadily disappears, mostly due to urban sprawl and cropland conversion, many grassland-dependent species have also disappeared. The black-footed ferret is one such example. Wyoming toads, a common sight on the shortgrass Laramie Plains as recently as the early 1970s, is another example.

You probably are already aware of the work we do on behalf of the black-footed ferret. The Zoo is a leader in a captive breeding program for this endangered species and celebrated the birth of 19 kits last year. But not many know of our efforts working with Wyoming toads. This disappearing toad is only found in a 50 square mile area confined to several prairie lakes in Wyoming. The Zoo is one of nine institutions that works with Wyoming toads in captive breeding programs as a way to recover wild populations. I'm proud to say that Cheyenne Mountain Zoo produced and released to the wild nearly 4,000 tadpoles this year. Without these efforts this toad is certain to be extinct, as has been the fate of so many other amphibian species.

The toad-counting survey I participated in required that we walk in a transect format following the edge of the lake's circumference of approximately 25 meters wide and 100 meters long. We walked this box in halves with a partner according to a zig-zag pattern

protocol while looking intently at the ground for something about the size of a golf ball. (I knew there had to be a point to bringing up my day at the U.S. Senior Open.). If we found one – a toad, not a golf ball – we recorded data like length, weight and age. Then we put a little transponder in the toad so that if it was re-captured we'd know that we'd already met. That spares the toad all the small talk that goes into an initial meeting and lets us get right down to becoming best friends. In three days we only found eight adult toads and a few toadlets. The toadlet find was particularly important because this means the toads are breeding in the wild since no releases have been done on this site for five years.

So more on The Broadmoor. This organization has the distinction of having the longest running five-star resort designation in the nation and is known worldwide for its golf courses. According to our friends there, the premier golfing is the biggest reason people come. And after the black bear, fox and deer were shown on television networks around the world during the U.S. Senior Open, I may have to re-evaluate whether it's The Broadmoor golf courses or the Zoo that has the best Rocky Mountain wildlife viewing!

What started out as a clear distinction in my mind between the grasslands of Wyoming and the grass on The Broadmoor golf course is beginning to blur.

As Cheyenne Mountain Zoo continues to commit to more programs where we breed endangered animals and release them into the wild, I want to personally express my appreciation to you for your support. Without you we simply could not do this kind of work. It is my hope that every time you see the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo name that you feel proud of what we are able to accomplish together, making our world a little better every time we get together.

Warmly,



Bob Chastain  
President & CEO  
Cheyenne Mountain Zoo