

## KOIN 6 "Fact Check – Oregon Zoo Defends Bond Money Expenditures"

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YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6911gLJRx74>

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KOIN 6 News "Fact Check – Oregon Zoo Defends Bond Money Expenditures"

Dan Tilkin: We're digging deeper into claims that the Oregon Zoo is not living up to its promises when it comes to a multi-million dollar bond measure that was passed by voters in 2008. Thanks for being with us, everybody. I'm Dan Tilken.

Jenny Hansson: And I'm Jenny Hansson. Now, despite millions more in funding, animal rights activists tell KOIN6 News that elephants at the zoo will remain in cramped quarters. We first told you about their claim last night at 11:00, and today we sent Jessica Morkert back out to do some fact checking. And Jessica, you just got a firsthand look at the conditions.

Jessica Morkert: I did, Jenny, and the Executive Director answered specific questions about this \$125 million bond that voters approved back in 2008. In Defense of Animals say what was pitched along with this is not what voters are getting.

Kim Smith: I know absolutely beyond a shadow of a doubt that we have never once come off what we promised enough on measure.

Jessica Morkert: Oregon Zoo executive director says the proof is all around. She tells me roughly half of the \$125 million approved by voters back in 2008 has been used to improve conditions here and to expand the enclosure for one of the zoo's most popular attractions from 1.5 to 6 acres.

Kim Smith: Ah, so it would be six acres for the elephants, which was promised in our bond measure in 2008. So we are completely fulfilling that promise, and they'll be six acres for the elephants with natural substrates throughout, and a lot of activity for them.

Jessica Morkert: Eight elephants currently live in this space, which is under construction. The zoo tells me when it's complete, it will accommodate 12 elephants. In Defense of Animals, calls the enclosure inadequate. They also claim the zoo pulled a bait-and-switch when it comes to the \$7.5 million in bond money earmarked for an off-site preserve.

Nicole Meyer (In Defense of Animals Elephant Protection Campaign by phone) Instead, it will be used for additional elephants that the zoo hopes to bring in, and also as a spot to ramp up its breeding efforts.

Jessica Morkert: Did the zoo ever publicly promise to voters to keep the existing herd as it is?

Kim Smith: You know, the zoo has always promised take the best care of the animals possible, which is what we are doing. We've always promised to take good care of our animals and improve the welfare with the bond.

Jessica Morkert: Smith says the zoo never promised not to breed more elephants, so we checked it out for ourselves. The actual bond language says, in part, the money will be used to create more humane conditions for elephants in creating an outdoor space from 1.5 to 6 acres.

And back here live now, IDA says the previous executive director has said that the zoo would use the offsite preserve for the existing herd and not add to it, but I just got off the phone with Tony Vecchio, he's the former executive director, he tells me the plan all along was to continue breeding. Bottom line is IDA says the space here for these elephants is just not adequate, but the zoo says it's not only adequate, it's healthy.

Live in southwest Portland, Jessica Morkert, KOIN6 News.

Jenny Hansson: Very interesting. We'll stay on top of that one. Thank you Jessica.