

Part 4 – KOIN 6 Investigates "Broken Bond Promise?"

YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ind67t5XrOM>

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Length: 6:23

Produced by Carla Castano

Jeff Gianola

Tonight in a KOIN 6 investigation, did the Oregon Zoo promise to build an off-site elephant sanctuary? Was that promise part of a 2008 \$125 million bond measure?

Jennifer Hoff

Some animal rights groups say they backed that bond because they thought a sanctuary was part of this plan.

Jeff Gianola

Investigative reporter Carla Castano is getting answers for us tonight. Carla?

Carla Castano 00:00:22

I started asking questions after people were telling me the Oregon Zoo and Metro, the government agency overseeing the zoo failed to follow through with campaign promises. They say the pledge to build the elephant refuge wasn't kept.

To Bob Lee (head elephant keeper at the Oregon Zoo):

Is it going to be a sanctuary or is it going to be an off-site breeding facility?

Bob Lee

I don't...I don't delineate the two like that, this (he points at the current zoo exhibit) is a sanctuary for these guys. This is their home, this is where they get what they need.

Carla Castano

Home is being expanded for the 7 elephants who live at the Oregon Zoo. The exhibit upgrade was approved by voters in 2008 but was there supposed to be more? Some say the zoo and Metro promised voters an off-site elephant reserve. Both the zoo and Metro say that's not true.

Heidi Rahn – Zoo Bond Program Director 00:01:13

That wasn't in the original ballot measure.

Carla Castano

Why the confusion? There's disagreement about what was expected. Even on what the off-site property would be used for and named. And getting a straight answer took some prying.

To Heidi Rahn

Just to be clear, is it an elephant breeding facility or what's it being called officially?

Heidi Rahn

It's ah...we're looking at it as an extension of our program.

Carla Castano

I'm sorry, you didn't answer the question. What is it called officially, an elephant breeding facility or an elephant habitat?

Heidi Rahn

We've been calling it a Remote Elephant Center.

(Cuts to an Oregon Zoo Bond commercial used to pass the bond measure to the public)

Voiceover:

"Of all the things we'll vote on this Fall, here's one we can all feel good about: The Oregon Zoo Measure. It protects animal health and safety."

Carla Castano 00:01:56

The 2008 Oregon Zoo bond only says it would give quote:

"More Humane Conditions for Elephants: Outdoor space will increase from 1.5 to 6 acres, adding watering holes, shade structures, large trees, and boulders, providing more outside exercise and offering a more natural environment."

But below that wording on the bond in bold print an argument for the bond stating:

An Elephant Reserve is Crucial!

That was written by the Oregon Humane Society (close up of the bond paperwork showing that was written by Sharon Harmon, Executive Director, Oregon Humane Society). They backed the bond believing that would happen.

Carla Castano (in a studio with Sharon Harmon) 00:02:24

Who was saying that that was going to happen?

Sharon Harmon – [Executive Director of the Oregon Humane Society](#)

You know that was conversations with a lot of folks. We have presentations by Metro personnel and zoo personnel. We all went to meetings about it and we definitely came away with the impression that there would be an off-site reserve for the elephants.

Carla Castano

I found this video taken by a private citizen. It's from a Metro public in May of 2008, six months before the vote. (pop up says Metro Council Meeting May 8, 2008).

Carlotta Collette (Metro Board Member) is quoted on the video:

"The money for the off-site facility is in this bond. We are committed the very best elephant facility we can have in the zoo and in the community in our region and so that money is in here..."

Carla Castano 00:03:08

Metro councilor Carlotta Collette did not respond to my request for an interview. So I tried to talk to her after a Metro Council meeting but the Metro Communications Director wouldn't let me past him.

To Jim Middaugh – Metro Communications Director:

Are you trying to block us from talking to a policy maker?

Jim Middaugh

No (he says as he is clearly stepping in from of Ms. Castano blocking her from stepping forward) I'm just trying to assist you.

Carla Castano

Well, we're going to go try talk to them (Jim keeps stepping in front of her preventing her from moving). Are you going to seriously try to block me—

Jim Middaugh

What do you want to talk about—

Carla Costano

—block me from talking to a public official?

Jim Middaugh

What are you trying to talk to them about?

Carla Castano

Are we in a public meeting?

Cuts to voiceover:

And while Metro's website posts for the public meeting says "The public is encouraged to attend." I was not granted access to any public officials for answers.

Jim Middaugh

She's not here now but she will—

Carla Castano 00:03:39

Well, she was just here but then you blocked me from seeing her

Jim Middaugh

I did not block you (he is clearly still blocking her) please stop saying that—that is not fair, it's not accurate—

Carla Castano

I'm pretty sure you just blocked me.

Jim Middaugh

This is an awfully large room (he steps back and spreads his arms wide. Now the room is completely empty and all of the public and Metro councilors have left). I'm not a large person.

Carla Castano (voiceover and close up of a document)

I did find this Metro document from November of last year (2014). It shows the bond oversight committee discussing the Remote Elephant Center. It reveals the 240 acre site at Roslyn Lake would cost over \$1 million dollars per year to run adding a funding source has yet to be identified.

To Heidi Rahn:

Because now voters are still waiting for this and it hasn't been delivered.

Heidi Rahn 00:04:15

We have money set aside to construct an off-site elephant facility should it be something that the Metro council chooses to go forward with.

Carla Castano

Some animal advocates say the concept of an elephant refuge or sanctuary was brought up to get the \$125 million dollar bond to pass.

John Gramstad – [Free the Oregon Zoo Elephants](#)

That was included in there to kind of draw animal people in, draw people like us in who are suspicious of zoo and Metro—

Carla Castano 00:04:45

Oregon Humane Society Executive Director Sharon Harmon calls it a lack of planning ahead.

Sharon Harmon

It's taken a long time and still no reserve has been created and now it appears that it may not be.

Carla Castano 00:04:57

But the Oregon Zoo Elephant Curator tells me the zoos new elephant exhibit triples the room elephants have to roam and their quality of life will vastly improve.

To Bob Lee (Elephant Curator at the Oregon Zoo)

What did you say like this is their sanctuary...I'm sorry—

Bob Lee

Absolutely, yeah this is their home, this is what they know, they're around people who have known them...some of them for all of their lives. We've created this to be their home. We've created this to be their sanctuary.

Carla Castano

This space here?

Bob Lee

This entire thing. This is all been designed...for them.

Carla Castano

And this is like a sanctuary to you?

Bob Lee 00:05:29

I think the entire habitat is designed to be just that.

Carla Castano (in the news studio) 00:05:34

Metro paid PGE (Portland General Electric) ten dollars to have the option to buy the Roslyn Lake property. Now if they decide to buy the land they'll pay \$925,000 for it. But Metro has been doing studies on the 240 acres and there are some possible concerns like is the ground too wet for the elephants? And could elephant waste run off into Sandy River? Total cost to date for looking into the possibility of a Remote Elephant Center are at about \$118,000. Now so far efforts to find a different property have been unsuccessful. Live in the newsroom, Carla Castano, KOIN 6 news.

Jeff Gianola

Okay Carla, this concludes your four-part series on the elephants at the Oregon Zoo and what great work.

00:06:23

[Part 1 – Coping in Captivity](#)

[Part 2 – Elephant Breeding](#)

[Part 3 – A Dangerous Practice?](#)