

April 24, 2023

Via e-mail

Luke Hoffman
 Game Damage & Commercial Parks Manager
 Colorado Parks & Wildlife
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Officer Leon Martinez
 District Wildlife Manager
 Colorado Parks & Wildlife
leon.martinez@state.co.us

**Re: Request to Investigate and Take Appropriate Enforcement Action
 Against Colorado Gators Reptile Park**

Dear Mr. Hoffman and Officer Martinez:

I am writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) on the heels of the devastating fire that reportedly killed hundreds of snakes, lizards, tortoises, parrots, and cats trapped in the reptile barn at Colorado Gators Reptile Park, located at 9162 Lane 9 North, Mosca, CO 81156, on April 18, 2023.¹ According to news reports, the cause of the fire has not been identified but foul play is not suspected. Apparently, tragedies associated with poor facility maintenance are a repeat occurrence at this facility. In 2019, twelve alligators died of pneumonia after being exposed to “extreme cold” when a hot-water pipe malfunctioned and nobody noticed for days.² PETA has repeatedly urged Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) to investigate this facility and take appropriate enforcement action. But year-over-year CPW appears to blindly renew its license. For the safety and protection of the remaining animals at Colorado Gators Reptile Park, and for those frequenting the facility, please do not ignore this renewed request. This facility should not be permitted to reopen and continue to jeopardize the safety of the remaining animals, including two Nile Crocodiles—a species classified as threatened under the Endangered Species Act—or any newly added animals.³

The Zoological Park License issued to Colorado Gators Reptile Park includes a condition that “[t]he facility must be maintained to provide for the safety and protection of wildlife and people.”⁴ A facility that fails to comply with this

¹ See Richard Cote & Courtney Yuen, *Fire Kills Reptiles, Birds at Colorado Alligator Park*, 9 NEWS (Apr. 18, 2023, 6:23 PM), <https://www.9news.com/amp/article/life/animals/colorado-gator-farm-fire/73-323244c6-91c6-4b73-9b2e-016e2ba5a3aa>.

² See Ex. 1 at 10 (Application, Dec. 28, 2019). In that same year, ten alligators died from a fungal disease. See *id.*

³ See Ex. 2 (2022 Year End Report, Dec. 23, 2022); 50 C.F.R. § 17.11.

⁴ Ex. 3 (License, Jan. 19, 2023); see also 2 Colo. Code Regs. § 406-11:1108(F).

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provision is subject to license revocation.⁵ Last week’s reptile barn fire appears to be the latest example in a growing list that demonstrates the inability of the facility’s owner (Jay Young) to comply with this requirement.

In January 2021, PETA provided the CPW a report, prepared by reptile experts who visited Colorado Gators Reptile Park, detailing the facility’s alleged noncompliance with the Alamosa County Code—which requires that all animals be provided with “sufficiently good and wholesome food and water, proper shelter and protection from the weather, veterinary care when needed to prevent suffering, and humane care and treatment”—and its Zoological Park License—which requires that a facility “be maintained to provide for the safety and protection of wildlife and people.”⁶ In addition to describing the poor conditions of the animals observed (e.g., a wounded American Alligator, a snake apparently affected with a fungal infection, a Caiman with a large amount of caseous material along the jawline), the report provided examples of the facility’s unsafe physical conditions, including Russian Tortoises “housed in a cage with a peeling wood interior and caked with food,” a leaking roof where the Sulcata Tortoises roamed, splintering wooden bird cages, and mud puddle hazards on the floors. The report noted: “The great majority of habitats we observed were in poor physical condition. In the turtle area, the metal beams used to construct this green-house type shelter were rusting, likely from years of constant humidity. It is surprising this area has not simply fallen down.”

In that same letter, PETA renewed its previous requests for authorities to investigate this facility.⁷ However, it does not appear that CPW followed through on its plans to inspect the facility. In response to a public records request, PETA received an e-mail explaining that the CPW planned to inspect Colorado Gators Reptile Park in the summer of 2021—after Young added enclosures to “more-effectively accommodate the animals he possesses.”⁸ However, on January 19, 2023, PETA requested all records dating back to May 1, 2021, related to, inter alia, inspections and investigations; CPW did not provide any responsive records indicating that either was undertaken.⁹

The CPW has the duty to protect wildlife and the authority to ensure that licensed facilities are maintained to provide for the safety and protection of wildlife and people. Before any more animals—or the public—suffer because of Young’s apparent disregard for this fundamental license requirement, PETA urges CPW to investigate Colorado Gators Reptile Park and undertake appropriate enforcement action. I look forward to your response.

Very truly yours,



Regina Lazarus
Counsel, Regulatory Affairs



⁵ See Ex. 3 (License, Jan. 19, 2023); 2 Colo. Code Regs. § 406-11:1107(G).

⁶ Code of Ordinances of Alamosa County, Colorado, § 3-70(a); see Ex. 4 (Letter from PETA, Jan. 19, 2021).

⁷ See Ex. 4, at 1 (Letter from PETA, Jan. 19, 2021) (“PETA renews its requests for an investigation of Colorado Gators based on the information set forth in its correspondence to CPW on December 31, and to Alamosa County Sheriff’s Office on December 17, outlining animal welfare concerns that may violate Alamosa County Code”); see generally Ex. 5 (Letter from Sinnott, Dec. 17, 2020).

⁸ Ex. 6 (E-mail from Hoffman, Mar. 9, 2021).

⁹ See Ex. 7 (E-mail Chain, Jan. 19, 2023); Ex. 7 (E-mail Chain, Feb. 9, 2023) (attachments on file with PETA).