



23 February 2004

AMERICAN ZOO AND
AQUARIUM ASSOCIATION

8403 Colesville Road
Suite 710
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3314
Phone: 301-562-0777
Fax: 301-562-0888
www.aza.org

Ms. Pamela A. Thomas-Graham
President and CEO of CNBC
2200 Fletcher Avenue, Suite 13
Fort Lee, N.J. 07024

Dear Madam:

We are writing you on behalf of the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA). AZA is a non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of zoos and aquariums in the areas of animal care and husbandry, conservation, education, science and recreation. Collectively, AZA's 213 accredited member institutions draw over 143 million visitors annually from around the world and have more than 5 million zoo and aquarium members. AZA's vision is a world where all people respect, value and conserve animals and nature. We work cooperatively within and between institutions, as well as with threatened and endangered species' range countries to save and protect the wonders of our living natural world.

We are writing to you to voice our extreme concern with the recent news that upcoming episodes of CNBC's new program "The Dennis Miller Show" will feature a young chimpanzee as the host's "sidekick." The use of chimpanzees and other great apes for entertainment such as this creates terribly wrong perceptions of these animals, which are highly endangered in their native Africa.

In fact, a number of our AZA zoos have conducted surveys that reveal that many respondents believe chimpanzees are not endangered because they are so regularly seen on TV. These respondents believe that if chimpanzees were endangered, they would not be used in this manner. The crisis of the bush meat trade is threatening the very survival of chimpanzees and other great apes in the wild. We are working hard to raise the public's awareness of the endangered status of chimpanzees, and CNBC's use of this sidekick chimp will counter this message.

Moreover, performing apes are youngsters. Audiences see cute, cuddly human-like animals and might form the impression they are easily handled. These reasons make young apes popular as pets and for use in the entertainment industry. However, adult chimps are much larger than babies, much stronger than humans, very strong-willed and can seldom be handled. Zoos often are the recipients of calls from owners who can no longer manage these intelligent, powerful animals. A zoo or sanctuary may be able to take in a few of these abandoned chimpanzees, but most of them are placed back in the pet trade and all too often in very inhumane conditions.

We understand that entertainment, just like wildlife, plays an important and positive role in our lives. It is our hope that society continues to find ways to balance the two to the benefit of all. We also understand that it is our responsibility to educate not only our visitors but also business executives who may be unaware of the adverse consequences a seemingly harmless business decision can have on wildlife conservation.

The AZA respectfully requests that you reconsider the decision to use chimpanzees for the purpose of humorous entertainment on your network. The inaccurate characterization of apes as a caricature of human beings serves to undermine the welfare and conservation goals that we and many of your network's viewers work hard to achieve. We would be happy to provide you with additional information with which to make your decision.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sydney J. Butler
Executive Director

Steve Ross
Chair, Chimpanzee Species Survival Plan

The Chimpanzee Species Survival Plan is a cooperative population management and conservation program for chimpanzees living in zoos accredited by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA). The steering committee and advisory board is made up of experts in the field of chimpanzee care and behavior and are well positioned as advocates for the well being of chimpanzees both inside and outside of accredited zoos.