

GRIFFITH PARK PONY RIDES POLICIES AND PRACTICES

PROGRESS REPORT #1

To the DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION AND PARKS FOR THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES

Regarding the third-party equine expert assessment

By Rachael Sachar, DVM

CEO Twin Oaks Equine Veterinary Services

APRIL 4, 2022

GRAFFITH PARK PONY RIDES POLICIES AND PRACTICES

PROGRESS REPORT #1

INTRODUCTION

My name is Dr. Rachael Sachar. I have a Doctorate in Veterinary Medicine and a Bachelor of Science degree in animal science. I own and operate an ambulatory practice in Los Angeles County and focus primarily on equine, livestock, and exotic animals in all aspects of veterinary medicine and animal welfare. I frequently work with the LA Country Care and Control on large animal abuse cases, welfare evaluations, and rescues. My practice also services a large population of animals (including exotic animals) for hire involved in the movie and entertainment industry as well as those put-on display in animal sanctuaries.

I was hired by the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks (RAP) as a third-party equestrian expert to assess the Griffith Park Pony Rides (GPPR) ponies and livestock, provide expertise on the welfare of the animals, review and report on the current policies and practices of the operation, and provide recommendations to any necessary changes to the operation of the pony rides to ensure the horses are being well cared for.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF ORIGINAL REPORT

During my previous inspections (December 18th, 2021 and January 3rd, 2022), I found that most of the ponies and livestock examined were in reasonably good health and the facility was generally acceptable, but there were several legal violations that needed to be rectified, medical issues that needed to be addressed, and new policies and practices that needed to be established for the safety and welfare of the animals involved and to provide a predictable transparent means by which the facility and its animals can be easily inspected and the health and wellbeing of the animals improved. From the information gathered during these visitations, I made my initial assessment of the GPPR and provided a detailed report, along with a list of recommendations to any necessary changes to the operation of the pony rides to ensure the horses are being well cared for.

FOLLOW-UP INSPECTION

On Friday, March 18th, 2021 I returned to the GPPR facility to follow-up on my initial recommendations and reassess the current operations. Upon my arrival, the owner/operator was contacted, and I had a video conference call with him where we discussed my previous recommendations and any progress that had been made since my last inspection. Following my conversation, I observed the pony ride exhibits during normal business operations, re-inspected the facilities, reviewed each of the animal records, reviewed the charts of operation, and was given a copy of the updated GPPR employee handbook for review.

GENERAL IMPRESSIONS FROM FOLLOW-UP INSPECTION (March 18, 2022 visit)

I found the working conditions to be satisfactory and did not witness any gross violations related to the care or the treatments of the animals on exhibit. In the main exhibit, I observed that several improvements were made to the facilities.

The recent improvements and ongoing changes made to the operations of the pony rides, including new policies and practices, meet the current legal standards set forth by California Health and Safety Code 25998-Standards for Horses for Hire and Animal Welfare Act and provide a more predictable transparent means by which the facility and its animals can be easily inspected.

CURRENT FINDINGS AND PROGRESS MADE ON ORIGINAL REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

(Recommendations from Original Report are numbered and italicized)

*1 - Each animal needs to be properly identified
(Name, age, breed, sex, picture, identifiable markings, microchip).*

A separate file was created for each animal at the GPPR and was made available for review upon my request. Each animal file clearly identified the individual animal (via a picture and detailed description of the animal)

*2 - Each animal needs to have an ongoing record at the facility available for review
(vaccine, deworming, and farrier schedule, medical and dental history, diet and workload restrictions and practices).*

Each file contained a copy of all its pertinent medical and farrier records. It remains a work in progress and will require some minor adjustments for clarity, organization, and transparency to ensure that anyone tasked with reviewing the records will be able to find the most important information when reviewing each record.

3 - Each animal should have an annual examination by a licensed veterinarian to check their overall wellness as part of a comprehensive preventative health care plan. and
4 - Each pony's annual exam should include a dental examination, and
5 - Each pony should receive annual dental care (occlusal adjustments /dental floats) unless the regular veterinarian deems the treatment unnecessary that particular year, and
6 - I strongly recommend that the ponies of concern (highlighted in my examinations) receive dental care by their veterinarian immediately and that all ponies that have not received any dental care within the past year receive it within a reasonable time (within 6 months), and
7 - Any ponies with saddle sores should be immediately examined/ treated by a veterinarian and removed from any work until completely cleared by veterinarian. All the pony's tack should be examined and modified, if necessary, before returning to work, and
8 - Any pony requiring a halter to be left on it should be supplied with a safer breakaway halter.

Since my last inspection, records indicate that the regular attending veterinarian has addressed and attended to the most pressing medical and dental concerns listed in my previous report and progress appears to be well underway for ensuring that each animal is closely monitored and given proper medical, dental, nutritional, and farrier care. However, during this inspection, I did not personally examine any of ponies on or off exhibit/display.

The weekly/daily charts of operation, schedule of working ponies, and feeding and medicating pony instructions were written on white boards on the tack room door. This appears to be an effective management tool in the short term, but it does not provide for any long-term documentation or record keeping for future review if it were necessary.

- 9 - *The outdoor chain link fence enclosures need to be fixed to prevent potential hazards, and*
- 10 - *The outdoor enclosures need to be graded to allow for better drainage.*

The outdoor pony enclosures and shelters have been recently improved. The footing has been graded to provide more adequate drainage. Progress has been made to reinforce some of the shelters with wind breaks to provide more protection from the elements. I was advised by the owner/operator that additional wind breaks for the rest of the shelters were on order. The chain-link fences that were in disrepair have been repaired. All ponies that were in the enclosures were free of any halters or other potential hazards. The enclosures were clean and had very little manure or urine.

- 11 - *Current Griffith Park Pony Rides Employee Manual should be thoroughly reviewed, updated, and made more transparent to improve current policies and standards of operation including policies for acceptable working temperatures and methods for monitoring the animal's health and wellbeing when temperatures rise or fall.*

The GPPR employee manual continues to be a work in progress and has been updated and revised to improve policies and standards of operation. These standards include those that govern the acceptable working temperatures and conditions in addition to the appropriate methods for monitoring the animal's health and wellbeing when temperatures rise or fall. It is unclear how employees are to determine this criterion without access to appropriate temperature gauges made available to them at the concessions during working hours. It was brought to my attention that several gauges had previously been placed and subsequently stolen from the exhibits.

- 12 - *Management of the ponies' water and shade access may also be improved and expanded upon at the pony ride exhibits.*

Multiple large water buckets were placed below each of the hitching posts (in addition to the existing water troughs that were above the hitching posts) to grant the ponies easier access to water. Additional shaders and misters were added, giving improved and expanded shade access to the ponies on the main exhibit. Chains (that were used for securing ponies to the hitching posts between rides) were replaced with softer ropes.

I did not observe any additional changes or improvements made to the pony-go-round portion of the concession. I did observe that during my inspection, the pony-go-round was stopped every 30 minutes to bring a bucket of water to each of the two ponies that were on exhibit. I also observed that it was difficult for the ponies to reach the water over the horizontal poles that the ponies were secured to and that the water buckets appeared heavy and awkward for the staff to effectively bring to each pony. A small handwritten sign was placed on the fence outside the pony-go-round to explain the frequency of water breaks. It is unclear if this practice is part of the required regular operations. A portion of the pony-go-round was in constant indirect sunshine during my observations. There currently are no additional measures to lower the ambient temperature in this area of the exhibit (additional shaders, fans, misters). In the pony-go-round exhibit, the ponies are secured to horizontal poles that are centrally attached to a turnstile operating piece of equipment that appears old and outdated. This piece of equipment and this portion of the display should be evaluated mechanically to ensure its current

safety, functionality, and any updates or improvements be made based on such an inspection. I did not observe any temperature or humidity gauges located anywhere in the concessions.

CONCLUSIONS

I am pleased to see progress being made by the concessioner to improve the Griffith Park Pony Ride policies and practices in response to recommendations made in my initial report. Moving forward, I recommend that the LA City Council and the Department of Recreation and Parks continues to monitor and foster the improvements of the Griffith Park Pony Rides operations to ensure that it continues to be a viable and sustainable concession and feature for Los Angeles and surrounding communities as well as an important attraction and recreational activity for its residents.