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Cameron Park Zoo Mourns Death of Donna

WACO, TEXAS (February 13, 2022) – Staff at the Cameron Park Zoo are mourning the loss of Donna, a 25-year-old North American black bear (*Ursus americanus*), who was humanely euthanized today after extensive cancer treatment. She was diagnosed with squamous cell carcinoma, a skin cancer, on her hind end in July 2022 and suffered from arthritis. Donna has been at Cameron Park Zoo since 2005 and was advanced in age.

Weighing the risks of different treatment options and keeping Donna's best interest in mind, the veterinary staff decided against conventional therapies like radiation or chemotherapy due to the possibility of severe side effects, the safety of the staff, and the stress it would have caused Donna. An experimental treatment was determined to be the best course of action using a cancer vaccine produced from Donna's tumor cells. The vaccine was produced by Torigen Pharmaceuticals and was administered by injection once a week for six weeks starting in August. Initially, the veterinary staff was optimistic as the vaccine appeared to be slowing the progression of her tumor. Despite successful treatment for breast cancer in 2019, it became apparent after several months that Donna's current cancer showed signs of further growth.

Animal care staff modified Donna's environment to ensure her well-being and comfort. Staff added black mats and blankets in the night house to give Donna a softer surface for sleeping. She was given specific fruits and vegetables, and staff began special preparation of the meals so Donna could easily chew the food. As a treat, she received some of her favorites, including donuts, pudding, and mayonnaise. Zookeepers moved Donna's sleeping quarters to locations where she could be closely monitored, and she was also given access to the outdoor exhibit overnight when temperatures were at least 42 degrees (F). Zookeepers spent extra time with her throughout the day and provided additional enrichment items.

The veterinary and animal care staff closely monitored Donna's quality of life. When it was clear that the cancer was negatively affecting Donna, zoo management decided that euthanasia was the best course of action to alleviate pain and suffering.

The Cameron Park Zoo staff and volunteers are deeply saddened by the loss of Donna. The support of the community is greatly appreciated in this difficult time.

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