

## Report on Research Compliance Volume 15, Number 6. June 30, 2018 Report: NIH Should Standardize Procedures for Chimp Relocations

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By Theresa Defino

A quick-acting NIH working group has recommended that the agency continue retiring research chimpanzees to sanctuaries, but first the primates should undergo a standardized assessment to ensure relocation would not be “extremely likely to shorten their lives.”

Such an assessment could be based on a five-point scale in terms of risk, with a three considered a “moderate risk” who requires mitigation strategies and a five deemed extremely high risk who shouldn’t be relocated.

These are among a handful of related recommendations a working group of the NIH Council of Councils made May 19 to the full council, which has passed them on to Director Francis Collins. The next step is for NIH to issue a public request for comments before proceeding.

Empaneled in January, the Working Group on Assessing the Safety of Relocating At-Risk Chimpanzees was charged with developing “factors [for] licensed veterinarians to consider when deciding whether to relocate NIH-owned and NIH-supported chimpanzees to the federal chimpanzee sanctuary system.” Several hundred now live at three locations.

In 2013, NIH pledged to phase out the use of chimpanzees in research with all but 50 eligible for retirement. Two years later, it pronounced all those it owns and supports “eligible” for retirement to Chimp Haven, the federal sanctuary.

But the pace of retirement has proven slow, and in April 2016, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) faulted NIH for not communicating how retirement would occur. In September of that year, NIH issued a broadly sketched plan that called for retirements to take place over a 10-year period (RRC 9/16, p. 6). Among the issues affecting retirement are capacity at Chimp Haven as well as the health of the chimpanzees.

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