

Full Response from Wilstem, Inc:

Thank you for reaching out and allowing us to respond. We appreciate your desire for accurate reporting. Yes, we are appealing these inaccurate non-compliances. The USDA has already admitted to mis-representing the condition of our giraffe and removed the body score their “giraffe expert” Laurie Gage determined him to be. We have exemplary medical care for our animals. We have applied for ZAA accreditation and the ZAA’s experts, in addition to multiple expert veterinarians that specialize in the husbandry of giraffes, agreed that the veterinary care and body composition of our giraffe is 100% appropriate.

The USDA has violated their own regulations. Their “giraffe expert”, Dr. Laurie Gage, has never seen the giraffe before, never looked through his medical record, or questioned the veterinarians working with the giraffe. Without having done so, she decided that our veterinarian and team were “incorrect” in their assessment of the giraffe’s body composition being appropriate. The USDA is overriding legal and licensed veterinary experts, as well as our attending veterinarian who we are to follow per USDA regulations.

The bison referenced in the inspection report was rejected by the mother. We have a strict policy in place; the first 24 hours is a non-interference time. The veterinarian was made aware immediately of the animal’s birth and the lack of interest from the mother. We have cell phone records to prove that animal care staff was communicating with the vet and attending to the animal within minutes of the unfortunate death of the calf.

The Watusi calf referenced was pushed by an adult Watusi under the wagon as it was passing. The witnesses’ statements support this. This was horribly unfortunate, however there was an employee present, and the vet was informed within minutes of the incident. As unfortunate as this may have been, it is not a non-compliance because it was the result of animal behavior. We cannot stop these animals from behaving like their wild counterparts. It is our goal to provide them with as much natural enrichment and freedom to roam as possible. A small facility such as ours, with a desire to provide the best, is going to immediately make the necessary changes to protect our animals from what we never thought could be a concern. We immediately re-engineered the wagons in our drive thru with bumpers to protect any young animals from a similar incident.

We have obtained legal counsel and cannot comment any further without compromising our ability to appeal and ability to pursue other legal recourses to protect ourselves, animal agriculture, and responsible animal ownership. Wilstem Wildlife Park prides itself on the treatment of our animals, and the thousands of people that visit our facility recognize the great care our animals receive as is evident based on our thousands of public reviews.