

Bowling for Rhinos Program Update

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A lot has changed with the Bowling for Rhinos program over the past couple of years and we are just getting started! Thanks to the hard work and dedication of all of AAZK's members and community supporters the BFR Program had grown to a point that a team of enthusiastic people were needed to help run and grow this amazing conservation initiative. As many of you may know AAZK made the decision two years ago to formalize the BFR Program and structure its management and oversight in the same manner as it runs all of its other programs and committees. The BFR Program team members come from all over the United States (Canada where are you?) and make up a diverse team of varied experience and years of involvement. Kym Janke is the program manager and has been involved in BFR since 2007; Matt Mills is the program vice-manager and has been involved in BFR since 2011; Kate Clemens is the Communications Liaison and has been involved in BFR since 2014; Kevin Shelton is our Conservation Partner Liaison and has been involved with BFR since it started in 1990; Lisa Haggadone is the Event Coordinator and has been involved in BFR since 2015; Selenia Murillo is the Conservation Resource Grant Coordinator and got involved in BFR this year! Finally we have the benefit of solid guidance and leadership from Azzara Oston who serves on AAZK's Board of Directors and keeps us all in line!

Bowling for Rhinos continues to be the most successful keeper run conservation program. We should all be so proud that to date we have raised an impressive \$7,242,619.47! Our 2017 total was the highest yet with \$607,580.69 supporting our incredible conservation partners; Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, International Rhino Foundation, and Actions for Cheetahs Kenya; as well as providing funds to Save the Rhino Trust through the Conservation Resource Grant for conservation efforts aimed at the Black Rhino population in Namibia. I urge all of our members to follow these organizations on social media to stay up to date with the important work they are doing in the field.

As the Bowling for Rhinos Program grows we are evolving and growing with it. Our goal is to enlist the support and participation of 100% of AAZK's amazing chapters! If your chapter holds a yearly Bowling for Rhinos event, we thank you for your continued support and achievements! If your chapter does not hold an event, we have only one question: Why not? Did you know that Bowling for Rhinos events do not have to involve bowling at all? The program team would love to speak with you and help you develop an event suited to your chapter, town, and audience! One of the main focuses of the BFR Program has been the development of tools that will help every chapter succeed. Lisa has been an essential resource to many of you, Kevin has been in constant communication with our wonderful conservation partners, and Kate has been doing an absolutely fabulous job at keeping our membership informed of all things BFR through frequent social media posts.

So what has stayed the same with the BFR Program? Our enthusiasm and passion for conservation has never been greater! We still encourage chapters to hold fun filled events that raise the funds our conservation partners rely on and we incentivize this by offering each of the four highest raising chapters to nominate one individual who will receive a trip to either Lewa Wildlife Conservancy in Kenya or to Indonesia with our partners at International Rhino Foundation. 100% of the funds raised through the many BFR events held annually are used in conservation efforts; that is why we ask chapters to remit a sanction fee before planning the event. This sanction fee covers all the administrative costs associated with a charitable event of this size, rest assured that all the dedicated BFR Program team members are volunteers who want to see as much money go to conservation as possible! If the amount of money totaled from the sanction fees exceeds the actual administrative costs then this surplus is put right back into the Bowling for Rhinos event totals for that year.

What has changed with the BFR Program? The way that the Anna Merz Champion Award is selected was changed last year. Each chapter has the opportunity to nominate one member who has made a difference in their BFR events and all chapters (with the exception of the four highest raising chapters) have the chance that their nominee will be randomly selected to win a 10 day trip to Lewa Wildlife Conservancy! We want to ensure that every chapter, no matter how large or small, has an equal opportunity to win a trip.

Do you know a deserving individual or organization that is conducting research or conservation initiatives aimed at rhinos, their habitats, or the local communities? If so then please make them aware of the Bowling for Rhinos Conservation Resource Grant (CRG). This year was the first year that the BFR Program team was involved in the grant selection process, as this was formally handled by the Conservation Committee. BRF team member Selenia is working on establishing constant and open communication with the BFR Conservation Resource Grant recipients. Our goal is to make AAZK members more aware of the diversity of support BFR offers through this grant and increase the visibility of the conservation work accomplished as a result. The CRG is supported by 2% of funds raised through BFR and is awarded each year; this can make a huge difference to a research/conservation budget! Eligible projects not only include in-situ work but can also be based on ex-situ rhino conservation and research. Help us spread the word!

The BFR Program team has also been very busy developing some new tools that will help streamline the BFR sanction process, provide resources to chapters, and aid in the organization of more successful events. Over the coming year we will be pioneering a mentorship program where successful, veteran chapters will offer guidance and ideas to newer chapters of similar size/geographic areas. We are also compiling a FAQ that will be shared with all BFR coordinators through a Google Drive with easy access to a variety of documents including one we are putting together outlining tips and tricks for successful events and insight from past trip recipients. We hope that through the Drive we will be able to minimize the number of forms and documents distributed through the sanction packet and instead have them all located in one place with no need to worry about a deleted email or a new email address.

We have also been reviewing the website and all forms and documents associated with BFR to ensure that everything is up to date and that redundancies are removed. We appreciate your patience as we work through the massive amounts of documents compiled over the last 28 years!

Conference 2017 also introduced some changes to better embrace and celebrate all the deserving conservation initiatives of AAZK members. The BFR Rally was replaced with the Conservation Rally, because no matter how biased I may be (Go Rhinos!!), there are a lot of deserving AAZK Programs aimed at helping the planet and all that call it home. The biggest and most positive change to the conference schedule was the addition of the BFR Summit. This one hour forum allowed AAZK members the chance to network, get answers to questions, and hopefully sent them home with many great ideas on how to run a smoother, more successful event! We hope that this summit grows to be one of the best foundational tools for chapters to use and encourage everyone to attend!

Do you have a suggestion or a comment on something you would like to see the BFR Program do or improve? Do you have an idea to increase participation in order to reach our goal of having every chapter support this worthwhile cause? If you do then please do not hesitate to contact any of the program team, we will be delighted to hear from you!

We are looking forward to 2018 being the most successful year yet since, as we all know, the rhinos need all the help they can get. With our diverse conservation partners focusing on rhinos, habitats, communities, and a wide range of wildlife it is so amazing to know that our efforts ARE making a difference. We couldn't do it alone and are excited to see what lays ahead!