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United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Seeks Public Comment for Better Animal Welfare Act Standards to Promote the Psychological Well-Being of Primates in Labs

May 1, 2015 (Washington, D.C.) – Today the Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service (APHIS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced in the Federal Register that it will solicit public comment on a Rulemaking Petition that was submitted by the New England Anti-Vivisection Society (NEAVS), the North American Primate Sanctuary Alliance (NAPSA), the Laboratory Primate Advocacy Group (LPAG), and the Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF) to adopt stronger standards under the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) to promote the psychological well-being of primates used in research. The Petition was submitted to the USDA almost a year ago. It seeks to have the agency adopt, for *all* primates, enforceable standards that are consistent with recommendations recently accepted by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for “ethologically appropriate environments” for chimpanzees held for research. If accepted by the agency, the new standards would apply to *all* facilities conducting research on *all* species of non-human primates.

The requested standards are based on scientific evidence and support from leading world primate experts. Such clearly defined standards would require all research facilities to provide for the psychological well-being of primates by requiring primates be housed in social groups, promoting environmental enhancement, requiring access to outdoors, and providing opportunity for choice and self-determination – all vital to primates’ psychological well-being. Further, the co-petitioners seek to assure that primates showing signs of psychological distress are given defined special considerations to alleviate their suffering.

The AWA was amended in 1985 to require the USDA to issue “minimum standards” for a “physical environment adequate to promote the psychological well-being of primates.” However, since then the USDA has failed to promulgate enforceable standards and has instead allowed research facilities to develop their own “enhancement plans” that are not even required to be approved by the USDA and are not made available for public scrutiny. For years, the agency’s own enforcement personnel have complained that the current standards are far too weak and unenforceable.

On behalf of the animal protection organizations that filed the rulemaking petition, NEAVS President Theodora Capaldo, EdD, explained, “USDA promulgating clear standards is critical to giving all primates in laboratories protections for their psychological well-being that they are already entitled to under federal law. The law, absent clear, specific and enforceable accompanying regulations, allows laboratories to interpret to their convenience. The regulations proposed in our Petition go far further in assuring primates are afforded protections they desperately need. It is now up to the caring public, animal welfare and sanctuary communities, and primate experts to let USDA know how important clear

rules and regulations are for laboratories to follow, inspectors to enforce, and the tens of thousands of monkeys in U.S. labs."

The USDA will receive public comment on the Petition, Docket No. APHIS-2014-0098-1, until June 30, 2015. To submit comments, visit the Federal eRulemaking Portal at <http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=APHIS-2014-0098>.

The petitioners are represented by Katherine Meyer of the public interest Washington D.C. law firm Meyer Glitzenstein & Crystal. A copy of the *Psychological Well-Being of Primates* Rulemaking Petition can be found at http://www.neavs.org/images/uploads/Petition_for_Rulemaking.pdf.

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Founded in 1895, the New England Anti-Vivisection Society (NEAVS) is a Boston-based, national animal advocacy organization dedicated to ending the use of animals in research, testing, and science education. Through research, outreach, education, legislation, and policy change, NEAVS advocates for replacing animals with modern alternatives that are ethically, humanely, and scientifically superior.