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News Release

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MEDIA CONTACTS:**

Jennifer Pacheco, Abilene Zoo Marketing Coordinator
Ph: 325-437-4692 Email: jennifer.pacheco@abilenetx.gov

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Zoo Staff Mourns Loss of Black-footed Ferret

ABILENE, Texas - The Abilene Zoo's black-footed ferret has died after a life serving as an ambassador for her endangered species. The animal arrived at the Abilene Zoo in 2013 on loan as part of US Fish and Wildlife's Black-footed Ferret Recovery Program.

"Romano was the oldest black-footed ferret in human care at 8 years, 8 months, and 19 days of age. Her health had ups and downs since the end of 2016," explained the zoo's veterinarian, Dr. Stephanie Carle. "When nothing medically more could be done, we consulted U.S. Fish and Wildlife who agreed on euthanizing the animal."

When any zoo animal dies, veterinary staff performs a necropsy to determine the cause, as well as to provide data for medical research about maladies that affect endangered species. The necropsy on this ferret revealed gallbladder and liver masses, likely cancer, along with severe heart disease.

Romano was born at the Smithsonian National Zoological Park and moved to the National Black-footed Ferret Conservation Center in Colorado at four months old. Her offspring were released back into the wild as part of their species recovery program in order to increase the population. Once retired from conservation centers, zoos such as the Abilene Zoo, display black-footed ferrets to educate zoo goers on the conservation program.

A member of the weasel family, black-footed ferrets are one of three species of ferrets on Earth and the only ferret native to central North America. The species body parts are yellowish-buff or white, feet and tail tips are black, and a black "mask" occurs across the eyes. These critically endangered species were driven to the brink of extinction in the 20th century.

The Abilene Zoo, in partnership with U.S. Fish & Wildlife, is currently working to acquire a new black-footed ferret to reside in Abilene.

Since its founding in 1966, the Abilene Zoo has stood as a place of learning and adventure. Situated on 16 acres in the award-winning Grover Nelson Park, the zoo has more than 1000 animals of 270 species from around the globe. The zoo is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Last admittance is 4 p.m. Tickets are \$8 for adults, \$5.50 for children ages 3-12, \$7 for seniors aged 60 and older. Members are admitted free. www.abilenezoo.org, 325-676-6085.

Mission Statement: The Abilene Zoo is a place of learning and adventure, where families make memories, share the joy of discovery and become inspired to preserve wildlife.

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