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Puerto Rico's Only Zoo Shuts Down After History of Negligence and Chronic Lack of Resources

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A rhinoceros inside an enclosure at the Dr Juan A Rivero Zoo in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico. By. AP.

Puerto Rico's only zoo will not reopen after a history of negligence and a chronic lack of resources.

"Animal welfare comes first," said Gov. Pedro Pierluisi last week. "Questions have been raised for a long time".

Concerns about conditions at the Dr. Juan A. Rivero Zoo in Mayaguez had been raised since prior to the 2017 hurricanes. "The zoo definitely has been degraded," said the Executive Director of Wild Animal Sanctuary in Colorado Pat Craig.

Prior to 2018, when the U.S. Department of Agriculture canceled the zoo's exhibitor license, there were incidents involving an emaciated tiger, a distressed cougar, two pumas which previously died, a malnourished chimpanzee, and a rhinoceros with a limp.

Several animals, including a kangaroo and a porcupine, had no access to shelter. There was also a lengthy list of animals which needed vaccines.

According to Mr. Craig, the Wild Animal Sanctuary will ultimately take up to half the zoo's animals except primates and 'unique birds'. The Dr. Juan A Rivero Zoo opened in 1954.

The Puerto Rico Department of Natural Resources has said it is cooperating in plans for transfers and with the continuing investigation in the zoo, which opened in 1954, according to the Associated Press.

"We have not skimped on the search for alternatives so that...the best possible care and safety of all the species that inhabit there are guaranteed," said Anaís Rodríguez, the department's secretary, who according to the AP noted that it wasn't until four years ago that the agency assumed responsibility for the zoo.