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U.S. Will Not Finance New Research on Chimps

By **JAMES GORMAN**

The [National Institutes of Health](#) on Thursday suspended all new grants for biomedical and behavioral research on chimpanzees and accepted the first uniform criteria for assessing the necessity of such research. Those guidelines require that the research be necessary for human health, and that there be no other way to accomplish it.

In making the announcement, Dr. Francis S. Collins, the director of the N.I.H., said that chimps, as the closest human relatives, deserve “special consideration and respect” and that the agency was accepting the recommendations released earlier in the day by an expert committee of the Institute of Medicine, which concluded that [most research on chimpanzees was unnecessary](#).

The report and the [quick response by the N.I.H.](#) do not put an end to research on chimps, but they were claimed as victories by animal welfare groups that have long been fighting for a ban on such research, arguing that chimps should not be subjected to experimental use. They said that the move was a step toward eventually ending chimp research, already a tiny segment of federal research.

Jeffrey Kahn, chairman of the Institute of Medicine committee that produced the report and a professor of bioethics and public policy at Johns Hopkins University, said the group’s recommendations would make it harder to use chimps in research.

“What we did was establish a set of rigorous criteria that set the bar quite high for use of chimpanzees in biomedical or behavioral research,” he said. He also said that, in effect, the writing was on the wall: “One of the important themes in the committee report is that there is a trajectory toward decreasing necessity for the use of chimps in biomedical and behavioral research.”

Wayne Pacelle, president of the Humane Society of the United States, which is strongly opposed to any experimentation on chimpanzees, said, “We’re tremendously encouraged.” He said the report’s “overarching conclusion was that chimps are largely unnecessary” for research, and

that the report and N.I.H. action could influence two other continuing efforts to stop research on chimps.

One is the [Great Ape Protection and Cost Savings Act of 2011](#), now before both houses of Congress. Another is a petition before the federal Fish and Wildlife Service to declare captive chimpanzees endangered, as wild chimpanzees are. The exemption has allowed research to continue and permits the use of chimpanzees in entertainment and as pets.

“‘Endangered’ stops all those uses,” Mr. Pacelle said, and the report’s skeptical assessment of the value of chimps in research would provide support for the Fish and Wildlife Service to categorize all chimps as endangered.

At the same time, people involved in chimp research said they, too, were happy.

Dr. Thomas Rowell, director of the New Iberia Research Center in New Iberia, La., which houses 471 chimpanzees, more than any other center in the country, also said he was “quite pleased” with the report. “It just confirms what we’ve been saying all along in regard to the chimpanzee model for advancing public health research,” he said, referring to the necessity of the chimpanzee for some research on public health.

Dr. Collins said the N.I.H. would set up a working group to decide how to carry out the recommendations. Until the group finishes its deliberations, no new grants would be awarded and all N.I.H. chimpanzees that are not already enrolled in experiments would not be involved in any further research projects. Dr. Collins did not offer a timeline or say how many chimpanzees were currently involved in research.

Use of chimpanzees has already been waning, partly because it is expensive. The report covers only [chimps owned or supported by the government](#), 612 of a total of 937 chimps available for research in the United States. Only a few are in experiments at any one time.

The committee identified two areas where it said the use of chimpanzees could be necessary. One is research on a preventive vaccine for [hepatitis C](#). The committee could not agree on whether this research fit the criteria and so left that decision open.

In the second area, research on immunology involving monoclonal [antibodies](#), the committee concluded that experimenting on chimps was not necessary because of new technology, but because the new technology was not widespread, projects now under way should be allowed to reach completion.

The report offered two sets of criteria, one for biomedical experiments, which it said could be considered necessary when there was no other way to do the research — with other animals, lab

techniques or human subjects — and if not doing the research would “significantly slow or prevent important advancements to prevent, control and/or treat life-threatening or debilitating conditions.”

For behavioral and genomic experiments, the report recommended that the research should be done on chimps only if the animals are cooperative, and in a way that minimizes pain and distress. It also said that the studies should “provide otherwise unattainable insight into comparative genomics, normal and abnormal behavior, [mental health](#), emotion or cognition.”

The report also recommended that chimpanzees be housed in conditions that are behaviorally, socially and physically appropriate. All United States primate research centers are already accredited by the Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care, and Dr. Kahn said that this accreditation meets the committee’s recommendation.

That was one area where the Humane Society disagreed with the report. “That language,” said Mr. Pacelle, referring to the requirements for adequate cages and enclosures, “was disappointing to us,” because it could mean that chimps that were not in experiments would stay at research centers.

“I’m arguing for the movement of all of them to the sanctuaries,” he said, where large open enclosures are much more common.

The N.I.H. commissioned the report after an outcry over its plan in 2010 to move a colony of chimpanzees it owned out of semiretirement in Alamogordo, N.M., and back into medical research at a primate center in Texas.

The N.I.H. responded in January 2011, by announcing it would leave the chimps in New Mexico for the time being, and by commissioning the Institute of Medicine to do the study released on Thursday. Dr. Collins confirmed that for now, the Alamogordo chimps would stay where they were.



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