Dolphins flip out of park plan

Aquatic exhibit backers bow to group's pressure

By Mark Eddy
Denver Post Staff Writer

Flipper was jumping for joy yesterday after backers of a proposed aquatic park in Denver announced they had scuttled plans to show off captive dolphins.

Bill and Judy Fleming, the driving force behind Colorado's Ocean Journey, originally planned to include dolphins in an education-oriented park designed to teach people the value of water and the life in it.

But the idea launched a tidal wave of controversy, and the local Animal Rights Mobilization group took the lead in trying to persuade the Flemings to exclude the intelligent mammals.

"We're declaring a major victory. We have been campaigning vigorously on this since last November," said Robin Duxbury, director of Animal Rights Mobilization.

Duxbury, who represented more than 22 groups opposed to any exhibit using captive dolphins, said research shows that up to 50 percent of the sea mammals die within the first two years of captivity.

Ocean Journey organizers dispute those claims but decided dolphins weren't integral to the park.

After six months of consultation with scientists, veterinarians and aquatic exhibit designers, they decided it was possible to build a healthy, humane environment for dolphins, said Sharon Sherman, spokeswoman for Ocean Journey.

However, the board decided the park should not duplicate existing facilities but should find new ways to communicate the importance of water and environmental hazards threatening it, she said.

"Our goal from the beginning two years ago has been to create an educational facility that will teach our children the importance of this vital resource and give them a lifelong commitment to preserving and protecting it," said Bill Fleming. "The dolphin environment is not essential to fulfilling this mission."

Dolphins won't swim in Denver

By R.E. BAIRD
Colorado Daily Staff Writer

After a barrage of criticism from animal-rights groups, Colorado's Ocean Journey has announced it won't have a live dolphin exhibit in its proposed $50-million aquatic park in Denver.

"Our goal from the beginning two years ago has been to create an educational facility that will teach our children the importance of this vital resource and give them a lifelong commitment to preserving and protecting it," said project co-founder Bill Fleming. "The dolphin mission is not essential to this mission or to the success of the project."

But Animal Rights Mobilization President Robin Duxbury said the decision was made after a coalition of groups and noted marine-mammal scientists launched a campaign opposing bringing dolphins to Denver.

"We are declaring this a victory," she said. "I'm totally excited. I guess I'm going to be able to go on vacation this summer after all."

Opponents of the dolphin exhibit said captive dolphins have shortened life spans and that keeping them in captivity isolates them from needed social interactions with others of their species.

Fleming denied the pressure from animal-rights groups influenced the decision. He said a six-month study with "hundreds of veterinarians, scientists, exhibit designers and aquatic facilities experts" indicated that it is possible to build a stimulating, healthy, humane environment for dolphins.

But he said there were already enough dolphin exhibits in the United States, mainly at Sea World ocean parks, and another one was not needed. And Fleming said the Denver park should "create new ways to communicate its educational message, which are planned to focus on the waters of the world and environmental concerns."

Colorado's Ocean Journey, yet to choose a site, plans to open in Denver in 1996.

Fleming has lined up an array of sponsors for his project, including the Adolph Coors Co., Continental Airlines, and Denver television station KUSA. As scientific advisers,

...Dolphins mixed for Denver park
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Colorado's Ocean Journey listed such notables as NCAR scientist Stephen Schneider, nature photographer John Fielding, and CSU ecologist David Cooper.

But following criticism by Ric Trout and Rick O'Barry of the Dolphin Project, Mark Berman of Earth Island Institute, and noted Orca researcher Paul Spong, several of the advisers pulled out of Fleming's group.

Fleming's critics pointed out that a high number of captive dolphin deaths had forced many dolphin parks out of business. And South Carolina has made the display of captive dolphins illegal.

Duxbury said her group would likely challenge Fleming's reported plan to display swimming Bengal tigers in the coming months.

No dolphins at theme park

Denver developers of a proposed aquatic theme park announced Thursday they will not include captive dolphins, ending a seven-month battle waged by animal rights activists. An international coalition of animal-rights activists had spent more than $20,000 on advertisements and mailings battling the inclusion of dolphins at the park.

Rocky Mountain News Staff

PETITION TO THE STATE OF COLORADO LEGISLATURE

WHEREAS: Cetaceans live 50 years in the wild but average only 5 years in captivity.
WHEREAS: Capture of cetaceans from the wild depletes natural populations and reduces genetic diversity.
WHEREAS: Captive wild animals for entertainment provide a miseducative experience for children.
WHEREAS: Fifty percent of captive dolphins die within 2 years.
WHEREAS: Cetaceans have a low captive birth survival rate.
WHEREAS: Dolphins are unable to use sonar in captivity.

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED, RESPECTFULLY REQUEST THE COLORADO LEGISLATURE TO INITIATE LEGISLATION TO PROHIBIT THE IMPORTATION OF LIVE CETACEANS INTO THE STATE OF COLORADO.

PLEASE PRINT NAME	ADDRESS	CITY/ZIP	SIGNATURE

PLEASE RETURN PETITIONS ASAP TO: **ARM!**, PO BOX 6989, DENVER, CO 80206, (303) 388-7120.