DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN
2015-2020

The 2015-2020 Toronto Zoo Strategic Plan, presented in this document in draft form, is the result of broad consultation and thoughtful deliberation with the Toronto Zoo Board of Management, staff, volunteers, members and key stakeholders. This Plan provides direction to guide the Board of Management and staff in their actions and decisions over the next five years. The Zoo’s goals and actions are organized under seven pillars that reflect the Toronto Zoo’s priorities.

Now more than ever, the work the Toronto Zoo does to save and protect species and their habitats is critical to the ongoing survival of many of the worlds’ most vulnerable species. That is why we are here. We are here because the Zoo is increasingly called upon to make critical contributions in the areas of wildlife care, research, veterinary and nutritional science and species preservation. We do this with many partners including conservation groups, governments, universities, environmental organizations and other wildlife care facilities globally. More than ever before, the work we do behind the scenes is vital to the survival of animals.

The Zoo’s impact on wildlife and their habitats extends beyond our 700 acre site. The Toronto Zoo has been a leader in breeding programs and reproductive research aimed at reviving and returning endangered species to their native habitats. By releasing endangered stock bred at the Zoo into the wild, the Toronto Zoo has helped to make great strides in preserving many of Canada’s threatened and endangered animals including the Alberta wood bison, the black-footed ferret and the Vancouver Island marmot. Our work extends beyond Canadian borders, with re-introduction programs for the Puerto Rican crested toad and the axolotl from Mexico as two excellent examples.

The Toronto Zoo’s strategy going forward builds on the strong foundation that has been created over the past forty years. This further transformation to a zoo-based conservation centre of excellence is supported by seven goals each with its own objectives. These seven goals will guide the organization for the next five years as we embrace our renewed mission and vision while demonstrating our core values in our daily activities.
INSTITUTIONAL STATEMENTS

As part of the strategic planning process, new institutional statements were created to reflect the changed direction of the Toronto Zoo. The new mission and vision statements are grounded in the seven pillars of the Toronto Zoo's Strategic Plan and signal our steadfast commitment to conservation of wildlife and habitats. Our mission answers the question: "Why do we exist?" Our vision conveys the impact that the Toronto Zoo will make on its various communities.

An organization's values are the guiding principles that define employee behaviour and action and remain constant while the operating environment is ever-changing. Our seven core values are the principles that are, and will be, embedded in our practices to guide our staff and volunteers in their daily conduct.

OUR MISSION:

A living centre for education and science, committed to providing compelling guest experiences and inspiring passion to protect wildlife and habitats.

OUR VISION:

Canada's national leader in saving wildlife to ensure the rich diversity of nature for future generations.

OUR CORE VALUES:

EXCELLENCE: We ensure the highest standard of care for wildlife, provide excellent guest service and create fun and transformational experiences that connect people to nature.

CONSERVATION: We are committed to practicing and promoting activities and actions that benefit wildlife and the environment.

INNOVATION: We encourage creativity, strive to think differently and turn our ideas into actions.

COLLABORATION: We conduct ourselves in a manner that fosters respect and teamwork among staff, volunteers and our partners to achieve our mutual goals.

INTEGRITY: We are transparent and committed to best practices and leading by example.

PASSION: We are proud, energetic and passionate about saving wildlife and will inspire others to value the critical role of our Zoo.
CONSERVATION IMPACT

GOAL 1: Advance to a zoo-based conservation centre of excellence

Objective 1. Establish the Toronto Zoo as the national leader in wildlife conservation, with a focus on Canadian species and habitats.

Objective 2. Achieve a sustainable wildlife population with a high degree of biodiversity within the Zoo.

Objective 3. Provide exemplary care to the Zoo’s wildlife population.

Objective 4. Invest in renewal of facilities and infrastructure to meet and exceed industry standards.

The role of the Toronto Zoo, one of the largest facilities of its kind in the world, has progressively evolved since its doors first opened 40 years ago. It is situated at the doorstep of Canada’s newest and largest urban national park (Rouge National Urban Park) where the Zoo shares the same objective of connecting Canadians with nature. While the Zoo draws more than 1.2 million visitors annually, allowing them a glimpse of creatures they might never see otherwise, the Zoo’s priorities have increasingly broadened beyond its borders and focused on saving and protecting species through wildlife care, research and education throughout Canada and around the world.

When the Zoo opened in 1974, it was thought the planet was losing one or two species a year. However, this year, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) stated that the worlds’ populations of fish, birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles fell overall by 52 percent between 1970 and 2010, far faster than previously thought. Globally, there are fewer than 400 Sumatran tigers left in the wild, the giant panda population has dropped to 1,600, orangutans are critically endangered due to habitat loss and the palm oil crisis, and rhinos will soon be extinct if poaching continues.

The impacts of climate change, extraordinary population growth and dramatic loss of habitat has resulted in the environment being thrust onto the international stage as a priority for many countries.

The Toronto Zoo has seen firsthand the results of these impacts. A number of the animals in our care are of species that have been pushed to the brink of extinction because of human activity. Without us, hundreds of species, thousands of animals would be gone. There is so much the Zoo can do to counteract the loss of biodiversity on our planet. In Canada alone, we have worked collaboratively with our partners to reintroduce Vancouver Island marmots, black-footed ferrets, loggerhead shrikes and Blanding’s turtles back into the wild. More and more we are playing a key role in breeding and conservation programs for threatened species – both here in Ontario and nationally. However, we can, and we must, do more.

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The ever-increasing environmental challenges compel us to further advance our efforts to save and protect species at home and abroad. Now is the time for us to take a stand, lead by example, and make conservation the foundation of everything we do. This is why we are undergoing a transformation to become a zoo-based conservation organization.

The Toronto Zoo is here to act now. Zoos around the world have an increasing critical role to play in helping animals and their habitats under threat to survive. Over the last 20 years, the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) has encouraged its members to reconsider their role and to place conservation as the number one priority for operations.

We are well positioned to take on this leadership role in Canada. We will have an even greater focus on broader conservation outcomes and will strive to become the premier institution in Canada for the preservation and protection of endangered species, most importantly threatened Canadian species. We will showcase the best Canadian interactive wildlife exhibits and programs in the world connecting more Canadians to nature and creating inspirational guest experiences.

We will endeavour to influence behaviour changes within our communities and in support of wild populations and habitats, particularly those in our backyard. As a wildlife organization we are uniquely placed to create our own specialist niche, one that enables us to inspire the millions of guests that visit our centre, and the wider community, to take conservation action and to work with animals that require our assistance to survive.

We look forward to this challenge.

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**GUEST ENGAGEMENT**

**GOAL 2: Enhance the guest experience to appeal to a more diverse audience and inspire conservation action**

**Objective 1.** Revitalize existing exhibits and amenities and develop new memorable experiences, to increase support for the renewed mission of the Zoo.

**Objective 2.** Advance accessibility on the Zoo site.

**Objective 3.** Create various opportunities for new audiences to connect with and support the new mission and to increase revenue and attendance.

**Objective 4.** Increase staff and volunteer interactions with guests to further enhance conservation awareness and the role of the Zoo in achieving that goal.
The Toronto Zoo undertakes many conservation and research projects locally, nationally and internationally for the benefit of threatened and endangered species. The projects are also a great way for our guests and the public to learn about species survival, reproduction and habitat preservation.

Situated on more than 700 acres, the Zoo is home to more than 5,000 animals with an even larger plant population. Over the Zoo’s forty year history, we have welcomed more than 50 million visitors to our site. During this time, the Zoo has evolved to enhance our guests experience to ensure they become not only repeat visitors but are inspired by their experiences at the Zoo.

We understand our guests are critical to successfully fulfilling our new mission and vision. We will continue to provide visitors with truly memorable and fun experiences that will make a lasting impression and motivate them to take actions to save and protect wildlife. We will do this through revitalized exhibits, increased animal encounters, more interactions with staff and volunteers, improved wayfinding, and high quality services that inspire people to take action to save and protect wildlife and support our new mission. The result will be guests who become our proud supporters, who convey their experience to others, motivating more people to visit the Zoo.

Guest experiences will have increased focus on educating people about the threats to wildlife and their habitats, with an emphasis on Canadian species. We will inspire our guests to take actions in their everyday lives to make a difference and we will embrace new technologies to enhance our guest experience to demonstrate the power of the animals in our care as ambassadors for their counterparts in the wild.

We have a renewed commitment to deliver enhanced programs that engage communities and new audiences, opening the door to people who may not have had the opportunity to experience the Toronto Zoo in the past.

**GOVERNANCE**

**GOAL 3: Enhance the governance structure**

Objective 1. Establish a separate fundraising entity to be the support organization for the Zoo.

Objective 2. Update framework and legal agreements to define the role and responsibilities of the Board of Management.

Objective 3. Enable strategic leadership of the Board of Management.
In the last few years, the Board of Management has made significant progress on defining the governance structure of the Toronto Zoo. This includes the relationship between the Board and the City of Toronto, as well as the potential to improve fundraising and private support for the Zoo. In October 2013, City Council considered a report from the Board on governance and a companion report from the City Manager, and a number of recommendations were made.

These recommendations include that the Toronto Zoo will remain a publicly owned asset and will continue to be governed by a Board of Management. This Strategic Plan includes actions stemming from Council’s recommendations and reflects the governance work that remains to be done. For example, there is a need to update the land agreement with the Zoo, the City and TRCA, and also to develop a relationship framework between the City and the Zoo.

The Board of Management membership will be changing in the coming months, coinciding with the new term of Council. To build a strong Board, the Strategic Plan includes tasks, such as providing a comprehensive orientation, to enable new members to understand what the Zoo is about and where it is going, to perform their role effectively.

This work will establish a sound and effective governance structure, which is critical for accomplishing all of our strategic goals.

**FINANCIAL STABILITY**

**GOAL 4: Build an organization that is fiscally and environmentally sustainable for the long term**

Objective 1. Nurture a strong and supportive relationship with the new fundraising entity to facilitate significant contributions to the Zoo.

Objective 2. Increase earned revenue through the creation of new experiences and programs.

Objective 3. Review internal processes to gain operation efficiencies.

To ensure the Toronto Zoo advances to a zoo-based conservation centre of excellence, a stable financial base with funding to support enhanced conservation and research programs and site operations and infrastructure is essential.

A key thrust for achieving financial sustainability is the creation of a new charitable fundraising entity separate from the Toronto Zoo. Fundraising efforts have been hampered over the last few years due to a downturn in the economy and adverse publicity related to the potential sale of the Zoo, which triggered concerns about the independence of the Zoo Board from the City,
an issue that has prevented many potential donors from supporting the Zoo over the years. It will be important for the Toronto Zoo Board and staff to be supportive of the new fundraising entity and to work in tandem to achieve our mutual goals. The Capital Master Plan will identify the Zoo’s priority capital needs over the long-term and will inform a potential new capital campaign. Likewise, operating program needs to support the Zoo’s Canadian conservation focus will need to be clarified to enable the new entity to raise the needed funds.

Over the years, the Toronto Zoo has been steadily growing its earned revenue, which encompasses revenue from admissions, parking, food services, group events, rides, rentals etc. A comparison of peer zoos, undertaken as part of the Assessment phase of this Strategic Plan, concludes that the Toronto Zoo outperforms most of these zoos. Nevertheless, there is some growth potential that can be achieved by expanding current programs, such as group events, and introducing new experiences aligned with the needs of our guests.

Operating efficiencies also is a key determinant in our financial health. As a public entity, we commit to best business practices and review our operations on a continuous basis looking for cost savings and efficiencies.

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The Toronto Zoo cannot go it alone. To be successful, we must work collaboratively with our current partners and seek new partners who believe in the renewed mission and vision of our Zoo. With scarce resources and the ever-pressing need for a diverse range of programs, the answer lies in leveraging co-operative alliances with others.

The Toronto Zoo is indeed fortunate to be situated in the heart of the new Rouge National Urban Park. There is tremendous potential for synergies between the Zoo and the new federal park with benefits for both entities. These include enhancing cross-over visitation between Park and Zoo guests, joint programs in areas such as conservation, education and research and possibly shared infrastructure opportunities. This special relationship can serve to solidify and
reinforce that the Toronto Zoo is a national leader in wildlife conservation, particularly with Canadian species and habitats.

Likewise, there are various educational institutions, government agencies and non-governmental organizations that can assist the Toronto Zoo in achieving its vision. By inviting new partners and strengthening our current relationships, this will lead to greater support for the new directions established in this Strategic Plan.

Additionally, we want to build on our corporate partnership programs. This includes elevating key sponsors that fully support the Zoo’s programs to become “principal” sponsors, which broadens their scope of involvement with the Zoo. The ultimate outcome is to connect more sponsors, donors and partners with the Zoo, at various levels of engagement, to realize greater resource contributions so that the Zoo can deliver on the goals and actions that support the new vision.

**PEOPLE**

**GOAL 6: Create an organizational culture that attracts, engages and retains highly motivated staff and volunteers**

Objective 1. Enhance internal communications so that employees and volunteers understand and embrace the Zoo’s mission, vision, values and goals.

Objective 2. Ensure that the recruitment and selection process reflects our culture and core values.

Objective 3. Provide learning and development programs that meet the identified needs of staff and volunteers to allow us to excel in our roles.

Objective 4. Improve reward and recognition programs to reinforce the Zoo’s core values and to better engage and motivate staff and volunteers.

Our people encompass our staff, our volunteers and our service providers. The Toronto Zoo’s transformation to a zoo-based conservation organization is predicated on harnessing and aligning the passion of our people with our strategic aims.

Essentially, our success lies with our people. We need to foster a culture throughout the organization that is built upon our six stated core values. This starts at the recruitment stage, before people enter the organization, and continues throughout their career at the Zoo. Our values of Excellence, Conservation, Innovation, Collaboration, Integrity and Passion will be embedded in our human resource policies, systems and processes to create a highly engaged workforce.
Our people at all levels in the organization will be encouraged through onboarding, training and development, communications and reward and recognition programs to embrace our mission, vision and core values. We will work to enhance our channels for communication to actively engage our people and thereby reinforce our desired culture. Every person in our organization will be empowered to become an ambassador for the Toronto Zoo.

UNDERSTANDING & CARING

GOAL 7: Increase awareness, understanding and support of the Zoo as a centre for conservation excellence

Objective 1. Assess the Toronto Zoo brand and re-position to align with the new mission, vision and goals.
Objective 2. Through school and education programs, inspire current and future generations to become active stewards of wildlife conservation.
Objective 3. Update the Membership Program to inspire our Members to be champions for the Zoo.
Objective 4. Increase awareness of donation opportunities to support the priority needs of the Zoo.
Objective 5. Increase the Zoo’s visibility within Canada and promote understanding and support of our critical conservation role.
Objective 6. Redesign the website and increase use of social media to communicate our conservation message.

Behind every animal is a story. Whether the animal is a critically endangered species or an ambassador for its counterpart in the wild, each animal in our care enables our guests to make connections and create emotional bonds.

The extensive work the Toronto Zoo does behind the scenes in the “hidden zoo” is a true testament to the exceptional people who work there every day. There are many stories of hope and survival and there is an incredible need to bring these stories to life and share with our guests and the public. These compelling stories will build a strong alignment between the visitor experience and life sciences areas of the Zoo, so that our conservation efforts and guests experiences are inextricably linked.

In order for our current and potential visitors, members, donors and sponsors to care about the critical role of the Toronto Zoo, they must have a better understanding of the breadth and scope of the work done behind the scenes, or as we call it the "hidden zoo".
While efforts have increased recently to further highlight the efforts of Zoo staff to save and protect species at home and abroad, more needs to be done to re-position the zoo-based conservation organization. Through multiple communications channels, including social media we will increase awareness and understanding for our renewed mission and vision and increase support for our zoo-based conservation organization.

SUMMARY

The Toronto Zoo believes we have a shared responsibility to care for the wildlife on this planet, and the Zoo works hard to be a leader in our efforts to save animals and habitats that need help. This five-year Strategic Plan not only reinforces this commitment but further emphasizes the critical role we have at home to save Canadian species and wild spaces at risk.

The extensive consultation process undertaken with the Board of Management, staff, volunteers, members and key stakeholders to develop the new mission, vision, goals, objectives and values confirms this new direction. We are confident that through increased awareness and understanding we will continue to capture hearts with our high profile programs that demonstrate our commitment to saving species and habitats, resulting in increased support in our fight against extinction.