



# OUR TORONTO ZOO // 2020 STRATEGIC PLAN



## // ONE TORONTO ZOO (1TZ)

Our Toronto Zoo has adopted an internal brand of “One Toronto Zoo (1TZ)” that is based on four “cares”:

**our animals // our team // our guests // our community**

These “cares” are the foundation of all of our work and our workplace culture. This paradigm is reflected throughout our 2020 Strategic Plan.

**We care about our animals.** *We value them and care for them; they are the basis of our wildlife conservation and public education efforts and their wellbeing is our priority.*

**We care about our team.** *Our staff and volunteers are the driving force behind our mission; we value their diversity, skills, and commitment. Their pride and passion in their work is evident and their retention, engagement and development is important to us.*

**We care about our guests.** *Our guests are our partners in our mission; they sustain us; and they are our agents of change going out into the world. We strive to create an easily accessible, fun, safe, and comfortable experience that encourages learning and creates iconic and lifelong memories.*

**We care about our community.** *We are part of, not apart from, our community. They are our champions for wildlife conservation and their support of our Zoo is critical. We must be “outward-facing” and always aware of and responsive to their needs and interests.*



## Introduction

With the global rate of extinction of animal and plant life now estimated at nearly 1,000 times the natural rate, it is critical that zoos, aquariums, and conservation organizations work together to educate the public and take actions to stabilize, then reverse, this alarming trend. The extent to which humans are impacting wildlife has never been greater; according to the 2019 United Nations report more than one million species are threatened with extinction due to human impact over the next few decades. Closer to home, two-thirds of North America's bird species risk extinction due to climate change, including approximately 50 species native to Canada. A 2017 study by the World Wildlife Fund Canada reported that about one-half of our country's vertebrate species have declined since 1970, at an average rate of 83% decline.

Our Toronto Zoo, serving more than 1.2 million guests each year on over 500 acres, is poised to meet this challenge. As a world class zoo and part of the global conservation community, our Toronto Zoo has met the rigorous accreditation standards of both the Canadian Association of Zoos and Aquariums (CAZA) and the US-based Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). Our Zoo works with the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to better understand the threats to wildlife and develop sustainable solutions for people and nature around the globe. Locally and regionally, we collaborate with governmental agencies, conservation and science non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and corporate and academic partners to share our knowledge and learn from each other to enhance our collective impact.

Our Zoo's work regionally and within Ontario is particularly important, with more than 230 plant and animal species at risk of disappearing from the province.



We must work with residents and guests to make a positive difference for wildlife and wild places—through education, habitat protection, conservation breeding and reintroduction programs, and our renowned work in conservation science.

Our Zoo's 2020 strategic plan, with its bold and ambitious vision, lays out a roadmap for change and issues a call to action. Our team of more than 1,100 employees and volunteers is committed to making our great Zoo an even greater force for conservation—by providing unparalleled animal care; by engaging our audiences in fighting extinction; by advancing our understanding of conservation science; by connecting our animals and our programs to field conservation efforts; and by creating a sense of optimism for a bright future for wildlife, wild places, and the people who inhabit them.

Our work would not be possible without the support and participation of our partner, the Toronto Zoo Wildlife Conservancy, to help raise awareness and provide much-needed financial resources to advance our shared mission of wildlife conservation. Wildlife Conservancy leadership has been engaged throughout the planning process, offering encouragement and counsel to craft our strategic priorities, and they will be a critical partner as we move forward with our plan.

We are also grateful for the long-term support and leadership from our Board of Management and the City of Toronto. We would be a very different zoo without the resources our City provides, and we value their partnership and continuing support. Our Toronto Zoo 2020 Strategic Plan has been developed with input from our colleagues in the City and our strategic priorities reflect that engagement and direction from our City Council.



In order for real and sustainable change to occur, we must embark on a path that fully aligns our Zoo with our community and our City. As a key quality of life asset for the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), it is imperative that our Zoo's strategic plan reflects the interests and needs of the community we serve, while at the same time addressing the worldwide challenges of wildlife conservation. Given this mandate, the 2020 strategic planning process included extensive community stakeholder engagement

and review and adoption of relevant priorities and goals of both the City's Corporate Strategic Plan and "*Wild, Connected and Diverse: A Biodiversity Strategy for Toronto*" by Toronto City Planning and Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division.

Our 2020 plan echoes the four pillars of the City's vision of being "caring and friendly;" "clean, green and sustainable;" "dynamic;" and "investing in the quality of life." These pillars of the City of Toronto's vision, along with our Zoo's "Four Cares" (our animals; our team; our guests;

our community) provide a common thread throughout the 2020 plan. They reflect a bold vision and commitment to the future of our Toronto Zoo as an integral part of the cultural and economic life of the City and as a leader in environmental and conservation initiatives, not only in the City and region, but throughout Canada and globally. Together, we can realize our vision.

Our sense of optimism for the future is matched by our sense of urgency—wildlife cannot wait, and we are ready.

## Our Process

Over the course of approximately ten months, more than 500 people were personally engaged in the strategic planning process via individual interviews, employee and volunteer town hall sessions, planning team workshops, small group staff meetings, board workshops, and a community roundtable that attracted 45 neighbors and community leaders. To develop a plan which reflects our community, we met with government officials, corporate leaders, college and university leaders, leaders of conservation and cultural organizations, neighborhood groups, Union officials, Zoo volunteers, and individual staff members.

In addition to this extensive personal input, our process included an assessment of societal and industry trends, a review of market data, Zoo audience research, and an analysis of Zoo attendance and financial trends. An online survey distributed via social media channels and Zoo email lists received more than 2,300 responses, providing insights into community interests, priorities and suggestions for the future development of the Zoo. Our community roundtable engaged a diverse group of area leaders and community representatives in lively dialogue around key strategic issues, generating several hundred ideas for our plan and resulting in a number of invitations to collaborate.

To make sure that our efforts are aligned with the City and that we are familiar with the ideas and plans of other key agencies and organizations, our team reviewed the Toronto Transit Commission's 2018-2022 Corporate Plan and those of Provincial Agencies such as Ingenium's 2020-2025 Strategic Plan, in addition to the City's Corporate Strategic Plan

and Biodiversity Strategy. Our plan also reflects the vision and guiding principles of the exciting new Toronto Ravine Strategy—an innovative plan to ensure protection and wise use of our natural resources.

From these sources and our review of the Zoo's 2015 Strategic Plan, our team identified a number of emerging issues that ultimately evolved into the five strategic priorities and objectives in our 2020 plan:

### **Save Wildlife**

Create a centre of excellence in conservation, sustainability, animal care, and science

### **Ignite the Passion**

Build the team for the future

### **Create Wow**

Re-imagine the guest experience

### **Our Community + Our Zoo**

Envision our zoo as the heart of our community

### **Revolutionize Zoo Technology**

Lead the way for innovation in technology for zoos worldwide



## // MISSION & VISION

An organization's mission is its reason for being, its core purpose—it's why we exist. Our Toronto Zoo's mission reflects our focus on bringing people together—our community, Zoo guests, stakeholders, staff and volunteers—and recognizes the Zoo's unique strengths in caring for animals and using conservation science to combat extinction. The choice of words, particularly the word “fight” here, was bold and intentional, and responds to the urgent state of wildlife conservation today.

In contrast to an organizational mission, a vision statement is aspirational. It's a bold idea of a desired future. Our Zoo's vision is unreservedly bold—a commitment to an ideal, and a challenge to all the Zoo's constituents to not only save wildlife and habitats, but to build a world where they thrive.

## // OUR MISSION

Our Toronto Zoo - Connecting people, animals and conservation science to fight extinction.

## // OUR VISION

A world where wildlife and wild spaces thrive.



## // STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Five strategic priorities, each with related objectives, comprise our 2020 strategic plan; action steps and business plan being developed by staff teams for each objective will define accountability, timelines, and key performance indicators. All strategic priorities are of equal importance and will be addressed concurrently, according to operational plans.

- I. SAVE WILDLIFE
- II. IGNITE THE PASSION
- III. CREATE WOW
- IV. OUR COMMUNITY + OUR ZOO
- V. REVOLUTIONIZE ZOO TECHNOLOGY





## I. SAVE WILDLIFE

Create a centre of excellence in conservation, sustainability, animal care, and science.

The animals and plants in the Zoo's care are the core of our operations, and programs in these areas are a source of great pride. Providing excellent animal care, engaging in conservation science, saving species and promoting conservation — both at the Zoo and in the field -- are central principles of a modern accredited zoo. Our TZ team has earned worldwide recognition for our programs in conservation science, especially reproductive and nutrition science, and we are known for our work in the conservation of Canadian species aimed at restoring native populations. Our focus over the course of this plan is to build on our expertise in science, by developing strong relationships with governments and non-governmental agencies, by expanding our collaborations with universities and increasing our peer reviewed publications, and by leveraging this original content to gain greater awareness and create conservation advocates among our scientific colleagues and the broader public.

Sustainability is a key component of our "centre of excellence" concept, for our internal operations and also for our guests to embrace. The Zoo's sustainability projects are aligned with City and regional initiatives and vision: "Toronto is a clean, green and sustainable city." To fully achieve excellence, our Zoo must not only perform to the highest standards, but also communicate our accomplishments and promote conservation action and sustainability among our constituents. We must seize this opportunity to more fully engage our public and guests in taking action to save wildlife and wild places locally, regionally, and around the globe through education programs, citizen science projects, and broad-based public awareness outreach on sustainability.



# SAVE WILDLIFE

- A. Establish a Zoo brand which reflects our expertise in conservation science and our work to save Canada's native wildlife
- B. Make everyone a conservation champion      staff, volunteers, guests, and our community
- C. Tell the world how we save wildlife and wild places
- D. Model best practices in sustainability, drive innovation, and manage our operations and resources wisely



## II. IGNITE THE PASSION

Build the team for the future.

Our Zoo is fortunate to have talented, experienced employees at all levels, along with an extraordinary corps of dedicated, knowledgeable, and supportive volunteers. Our organization is passionate; we believe in our ability to stimulate positive change, and while we still have work to do, we are committed to ensuring greater inclusion and transparency. We are excited about our future. Opportunities exist to further strengthen the organization, building a stronger, more cohesive workplace culture and increasing staff and volunteer development. A critical part of our plan will be the development and adoption of new organizational core values. We will work across all divisions and at all levels, including our Union members, and with our volunteers, to create these value statements—and we will live by them. Our team is ready for a new direction for the Zoo. We are ready to embrace the challenge, and excited about our new vision.

As our Zoo grows and adapts to societal changes, our investment in human capital must change and grow too. Our people are our most valuable asset. Strengthening our “talent management,” including staff and volunteer recruitment, training and development (human resources functions) is a priority for this plan. Our Zoo believes in the value of diversity and inclusion as a key factor in a positive workplace culture. Our initiatives in this goal mirror the City’s focus on workplace culture, accountability and performance and the role of leadership in driving change, as noted in the City’s plan: “Our leadership teams understand that they play a critical role and are accountable in building that positive workplace culture, so that collectively we achieve Toronto’s vision, motto and mission.”





# IGNITE THE PASSION

- A. Pursue unity of purpose through “1TZ” (“One Toronto Zoo”) and foster a sense of community
- B. Develop our people, cultivating excellence and acknowledging performance
- C. Live our plan and continuously evolve our organization to keep pace with societal, market, and cultural changes
- D. Keep everyone in the loop -share knowledge broadly and openly





### III. CREATE WOW

Re-imagine the guest experience.

Our goal is to engage minds and hearts; offering “up close” experiences and learning opportunities that demonstrate how the Zoo cares for animals and how every individual can be part of the conservation solution, and not part of the problem.

At more than 500 acres, our Zoo campus presents vast opportunities for guest engagement and recreation, coupled with equally vast challenges due to the layout, topography, number and diversity of exhibits and experiences, and sheer size of the grounds. The creation of the nearby Rouge National Urban Park, Canada’s first national urban park, and the Meadoway greenspace plan, offer the prospect of new “wilderness” and adventure experiences in conjunction with the Zoo and the chance to attract new and diverse audiences who seek this type of experience.

In addition to providing opportunities to enjoy the outdoors and explore nature, we’re transforming the way we present our Zoo and how guests learn about who we are and what we do. A recent survey revealed that people are eager for more information on our Zoo’s work in conservation, on animals, and how we care for our animals. In response, we’ll create new perspectives and appreciation for animals through habitat upgrades, offering many more ways to learn about and enjoy our animals and how you — our guests and our community — can help us save wildlife.

Over the next few years, we’ll be trying out some exciting and innovative ways to explore the Zoo and learn about animals and conservation. For example, guests might be treated to an augmented reality experience that blurs the lines between animals, people, and the environment, or get to try out being a keeper or wildlife researcher via an interactive game. In addition to these “virtual” experiences, our Zoo team is committed to “opening doors” to the wonders and complexities of animal care behind the scenes. We are dedicated to greater public engagement (and more fun!) with our conservation and science programs, so we’ll be providing additional opportunities to visit our behind-the-scenes areas, meet animal care professionals, learn how our Zoo saves wildlife, and even take part in a conservation project. We will make the hidden zoo go extinct!

Our guests’ comfort and satisfaction is critically important to our success; we’re planning new experiences and amenities from the moment of entry to the moment of departure such as upgraded food and retail offerings, improved access to Zoo exhibits, and new technology to expedite ticketing and entry. We will look for ways to extend our guests’ visit in their homes, possibly via follow-up activities and webcams—so that they can continue their discovery and deepen their connection with our Zoo. We are unwavering in our pursuit of excellence in guest amenities and concessions and know that guest satisfaction is an essential for a great visit and for forging enduring relationships.



# CREATE WOW

- A. Set the stage at our entrance/exit area for a visit that delights guests and highlights our role in wildlife conservation
- B. Tell every guest our story of wildlife conservation through science, animal care, and education
- C. Take great care of our guests: feed them better, make them more comfortable, and make it easier for them to find our animals, habitats, and attractions
- D. Plants matter — showcase the importance of our plants and our landscape to our mission





## IV. OUR COMMUNITY + OUR ZOO

Envision our Zoo as the heart of our community.

The Zoo's commitment to the Greater Toronto Area and to our local and regional neighbors reflects the City's strategic focus on its people and partnerships and its goal to "invest in people and neighbourhoods." Development of the Zoo as a civic commons, with facilities, amenities, and programs that welcome and appeal to diverse audiences is fully aligned with City priorities and with our Zoo's mission of "connecting people, animals and conservation science." Sociologist and author Elijah Anderson described such a place as a "cosmopolitan canopy": an island of civility where diverse peoples come together and interact across racial, ethnic, and social borders. This is precisely the vision we share for our Zoo.

To fully realize this mission and goal, connections to the Zoo must be improved throughout the region to provide easy access for both day and evening events, and at the same time, communication of best ways to access the Zoo should be implemented. TTC (Toronto Transit Commission) has been a valued partner in our work to facilitate access to our Zoo and we must build more avenues of collaboration throughout the area. Regional initiatives such as the Meadoway Multi-Use Trail have the potential to introduce new audiences to the Zoo and neighbouring Rouge Park, and discussions with public transit agencies including York, Durham, and Metrolinx will continue to address the larger, diverse, GTA population. The Zoo's partnerships with civic, governmental, academic, scientific and cultural institutions will be essential to the goal of creating a welcoming gathering place that is truly "of and for the people."



# OUR COMMUNITY + OUR ZOO

- A. Be recognized as a gathering place for all; a “Cosmopolitan Canopy” that breaks down barriers and celebrates diversity
- B. Deepen relationships throughout our community to engage new and diverse audiences
- C. Ensure access for all in transportation, language, facilities, and admission policies





## V. REVOLUTIONIZE ZOO TECHNOLOGY

Lead the way for innovation in technology for zoos worldwide

The City of Toronto has a growing reputation for technology and innovation, and our Zoo has made this area a priority for development in three sectors: guest experience, including all “guest-facing” operations; animal care, conservation, and science; and business operations.

Embarking on a bold program of tech innovation offers a unique opportunity for the Zoo to make its mark in a new way. Although many zoos and aquariums have begun this journey to develop or employ new technologies, few have made the significant time and resource investments, and fewer still have succeeded. Without good models and with limited resources, this will not be an easy task. Nevertheless, it is an exciting and ground-breaking initiative worth pursuing. Achieving success will require a real commitment to dedicating the time, personnel, and financial resources needed, combined with working with tech partners, for this challenging and complex undertaking.

As a first step, our Zoo has already begun to develop relationships with potential collaborators in the corporate and academic sectors who can provide valuable experience and potentially resource support. Innovation and practical applications in zoo-based technology could benefit the field of zoos and aquariums and bring additional recognition to our Toronto Zoo's place among its peers.



# REVOLUTIONIZE ZOO TECHNOLOGY

- A. Make technology investment a priority in all areas of our Zoo
- B. Upgrade our business practices by developing or adopting state of the art technology solutions
- C. Transform how we engage our guests with leading edge technology to make connections between people and animals
- D. Explore innovative ways of doing science that position our Zoo as a world leader



## Next Steps: Action Planning & Implementation

As a next step, working groups will develop an Action Plan, drafting specific tactics or action steps and relevant business strategies for each of the objectives in the Strategic Priorities. These teams will include cross-departmental staff, volunteer and community partners who will confirm final action items, develop timelines and resource implications, and identify key performance indicators for each objective, to ensure that the final plan delivers measurable and realistic outcomes. Consultants will provide a template for use in developing action steps and conduct a working session at a future visit and provide Zoo leadership with recommendations for completion.

This approach should ensure full plan implementation and integration with Zoo operations across all divisions and disciplines and across all levels of employees. Zoo leadership can then integrate the plan into employee performance assessments and provide staff and board updates. This will ensure that the team is focused on critical operating and financial data, and, most importantly, determine the extent to which our Zoo is genuinely achieving our vision.





