

GUARDIANS OF WILD

2025-2027 Toronto Zoo Strategic Plan
(simplified version)

OUR MISSION: Connecting people, animals, conservation science, and traditional knowledge to fight extinction

OUR VISION: A world where people, wildlife, and wild spaces thrive

“The question is not will you deal with disruption; the question is will you win?” - Charlene Li- futurist

INTRODUCTION:

If you are reading this, we assume that you care deeply about animals and their well-being. For that we say THANK YOU! We appreciate your commitment to individuals and healthy populations thriving and are grateful you share our vision of a world where people, wildlife and wild spaces thrive. For us, that means making conservation science a priority and reflecting on how we serve wildlife populations.

Accredited Zoos like your Toronto Zoo are a critical part of ensuring a better future for wildlife and wild spaces. That said, we need to continue to evolve and change as maintaining the status quo is simply not good enough in our fight against extinction. Our commitment is to challenge assumptions and learn every day. The goal, to know better and do better in service to wildlife.

We are living in a period of significant disruption, and we need to consider how to do things in fundamentally different ways. Significantly expanding our Zoo Conservation Science efforts and connections to Indigenous communities are critical to this journey.

Why?

Because the reality for many species is simple. Out of sight, out of mind, and off the planet. Climate change and biodiversity loss are accelerating and placing new pressures on animal and plant populations, and we can help! We are ruthless optimists fueled by the belief that contemporary science and traditional knowledge together can make a positive difference. We believe Conservation is a team sport and we need more players. Our commitment is to add players in service to the natural world.

We will:

- build the systems to grow and empower more players, from all walks of life, to increase overall conservation impact.
- Redefine thinking around animals in human care thriving and living lives with purpose.
- Establish insurance populations for wild animals across Canada and beyond.

We emerged from the COVID-19 and Avian influenza pandemics with a new clarity and we are deliberately charting a new path.

Thank you for joining us on this journey and being a Guardian of Wild.

FROM PLACE TO PURPOSE:

We are moving from: A guest funded zoo with conservation science programs to a community funded conservation science organization operating a world class zoo.

By:

- Becoming expert collaborators, connecting to global conservation initiatives to produce engaging experiences and impactful discoveries
- Building on our existing support from guests, the City of Toronto, The Toronto Zoo Wildlife Conservancy and external funders.

Because:

- We are losing species faster than ever, and we need communities to come together to fight species decline, climate change and biodiversity loss.
- Our team has the talent and commitment, as well as the responsibility, to effect positive change for nature.

OUR PROCESS

This plan builds on the 2020 strategic plan, which was significantly impacted by COVID-19, avian influenza and a ransomware attack. Staff and community members were consulted on the elements of the 2020 plan that needed to be protected, and those which needed to be updated.

This journey was guided by a sub-committee of the Toronto Zoo Board of Management, and reviewed by our Indigenous advisory circle, who provided critical direction and feedback on its development.

Guardians of Wild efforts will align with and support:

- Our Zoo's Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Accessibility Framework
- Board approved Toronto Zoo plans & initiatives
- City of Toronto Net Zero and Natural Heritage Plans
- City of Toronto's Reconciliation Action Plan
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission Recommendations
- Canadian Biodiversity Strategy
- Canada National Priorities for Climate Change Science and Knowledge Report
- Environment and Climate Change Canada Science Strategy
- Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy
- Convention on Biodiversity (CBD)
- The World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Education Strategy
- United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs)
- United Nations Declarations of Rights for Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

OUR VALUES: *The 4 Cares*

- ANIMALS
- TEAM
- GUESTS & COMMUNITY
- CLIMATE

THE FOUR CARES DEFINED

- **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 will connect animals in our care to their wild counterparts, plants, and habitats to build a brighter future for wildlife.
- **TEAM:** Staff and volunteers are the driving force behind our mission; we value their diversity, skills, and commitment. We are Guardians, are a mission-ready team, animal care advocates, conservation science experts, committed to collaboration. We will believe in strength through diversity, assembling a team with next level ambition, curiosity and a spirit of gratitude- *we don't have to, we get to work in a place like this!* Everyone on our team is accepted for who they are and feel safe, comfortable, and empowered to be their authentic selves. Our pride and passion in our work is evident in team retention, engagement and guest surveys.
- **GUESTS & COMMUNITY:** We create an accessible, fun, safe, and comfortable experience that encourages learning and creates iconic, lifelong memories for our guests and community. Guests and community are critical partners in our work, we are humble and understand our responsibility to serve them. They sustain us, are agents of change going out into the world, and we take every opportunity to make their zoo an indispensable part of everyday life where all belong.
- **CLIMATE:** Climate change and biodiversity loss are existential threats to every species that calls Earth home. We will systemically evaluate our decisions to demonstrate climate leadership and reduce our impact, becoming a Net0 facility by 2034.

AS GUARDIANS OF WILD TEAM MEMBERS, EVERY DAY WE...

- Live our mission and demonstrate our care for animals, team, guests and community and climate.
- Foster inclusivity in everything we do, ensuring that all feel welcomed, valued, and respected.
- Meet all legislative, regulatory and accreditation standards and challenge them to continuously improve.
- Are curious and explore in service of improving processes and delivering on our mission and goals more effectively.
- Ensure we operate safely and protect our physical and digital assets.
- Use data to make informed decisions while driving operational excellence and revenue growth to expand mission effectiveness.
- Reinforce peoples understanding of accredited conservation Zoos being a force for good for nature

STRATEGIC PLAN AREAS OF FOCUS (AoF)

- BELONGING
- NATURE'S INSURANCE POLICY
- WILDLIFE ADVOCATES
- WOW FOR GOOD

AREAS OF FOCUS (AoF) DEFINED (*full list in Appendix I*)

- **BELONGING:** We are more than a place to visit, volunteer or work. We are a place where people gather, connect with nature, share iconic experiences, and build memories that last a lifetime. This is a place where you are welcomed for who you are, are part of the story as an active participant, and contribute to a better future for wildlife.
- **NATURE'S INSURANCE POLICY:** We are in the midst of the greatest extinction since the loss of the dinosaurs, and we must take action to protect species for future generations. We will challenge colonial conservation perspectives and embrace an inclusive approach, bringing together contemporary science and traditional knowledge. We will rethink how we set priorities and protect species in a rapidly changing world.
- **WILDLIFE ADVOCATES:** It is a privilege to have animals and plants in our care and we embrace the responsibility to be a voice for their wellbeing. Success means individuals and populations that are thriving, and we will evolve and improve our standards of care while pushing for higher standards across the country. We will bring groups together to challenge current approaches and evaluate our effectiveness, while also growing community involvement and action to effect conservation.
- **WOW FOR GOOD:** One size fits no one, and we will strive to deliver highly personalized experiences, every time. We will scar people in positive ways, challenge perceptions and make unforgettable memories. People will be called to act for wildlife and the natural world, equipped with knowledge and perspectives to engage in meaningful conservation action.

PRIORITY INITIATIVES: *The iconic victories we will achieve*

As a large organization, it is easy to be distracted by competing priorities. These are the five priority areas for the next three years:

1. Save Canadian species by braiding traditional knowledge and conservation science to deliver biobanking, conservation breeding and translocation programs.
2. Establish international standards and Canadian priorities for the biobanking initiative.
3. Make the Zoo a must-see destination, delivering customized experiences and facilities resulting in increased attendance and community engagement.
4. Connect every student in Toronto, York and Durham, with a Zoo visit enabling them to discover Conservation Science experiences and make memories that last a lifetime.
5. Embrace an innovation culture to build the most technologically advanced Zoo in the world.

ATTACHMENT 1

AN ORGANIZATION IN TRANSITION:

The Guardians of Wild 2027 plan builds on the 2020 Strategic Plan and existing community connections. It sets up your Toronto Zoo to expand our effectiveness and move onto the global conservation stage in service to wildlife and communities.

By the end of 2027 we have assembled champions from across the world to ensure international biobanking accreditation standards are developed and adopted. Our goal is to save species for generations to come and protect them from zoonotic disease, while establishing our reputation as expert collaborators, bridging literal and philosophical oceans to save animals.

A critical component to our success will be deeper relationships with Indigenous communities. This includes more opportunities for education, conservation, employment and storytelling with First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples. We are brought together through a shared commitment to connecting people with nature and a multi-generational commitment to the planet.

At the Zoo, our team of diverse, mission ready Guardians will have Canadian species recovery plans for target species being implemented. The Toronto Zoo Community Conservation Centre, complete with Blanding's turtle breeding facilities, classrooms and event spaces will be serving 1.5million guests per year to the site. This will include every student from surrounding regions participating in Zoo programming, welcomed by energetic River Otters at the front entrance.

These initiatives will be amplified by our science communications work, as well as through the establishment of strategic partnerships with the usual, and unusual suspects to increase our impact in conservation science, improve animal welfare standards and diversify revenue streams to complete these important initiatives.

We will build the capacity and support for our next leap forward, the 2028 Strategic Plan, where we will continue to push our evolving organizational identity and redefine the term zoo, WE WILL ZOO BETTER!

THE TORONTO ZOO BOARD OF MANAGEMENT HAS CHALLENGED US TO COMMIT TO EFFECTING POSITIVE CHANGE. AS GUARDIANS OF WILD, BY 2034 WE HAVE:

1. Become a recognized and celebrated thought leader in conservation, innovation and sustainability in the community, resulting in increased support and visitation.
2. Credibility as a conservation science organization recognized through publications, original storytelling and 20 PhD level staff members leading world class research and education programs.
3. Established a personal connection with every member of our community, resulting in 2 million guests per year to the Zoo site.
4. 175 species in our care living lives with purpose supporting their wild counterparts and habitats.

ATTACHMENT 1

5. Had a measurable positive impact on 5 Canadian species, improving species listings and establishing viable insurance populations.
6. Become a net-zero organization, actively fighting climate change.
7. Developed the most technologically advanced zoo in the world

APPENDIX I

Priority areas	Belonging	Nature's insurance Policy	Wildlife Advocates	Wow for Good
Animals	Ensure all team members have a clear understanding of animal wellbeing and the opportunity to connect with the animals we serve.	Save Canadian species by braiding traditional knowledge and conservation science to deliver biobanking, conservation breeding and translocation programs	Work with Governments and policy makers to improve wildlife care standards and support animals caught in the illegal wildlife trade.	Build the profile of Canadian endangered species and Zoo conservation science initiatives across the Zoo site and online in unique ways to protect and save them.
	Deliver programming and services to ensure the long-term success of the organization to serve animals in our care,	Establish international standards and Canadian priorities for the biobanking program.	Bring our animal care to the next level through the animal lives with purpose plan, process/facility evolution and	Increase revenues through unique and engaging experiences that can only be found at the Toronto Zoo to re-invest in animal care, conservation
		Review research priorities and establish a new framework for training, projects, education programs and partnerships.		Tell our conservation science stories to broad audiences in fun and engaging ways to advance our profile as a conservation science organization and inspire action
Team	Expand recruitment efforts to better reflect our community and strengthen talent management frameworks to support staff and volunteers.	Build capacity to support the conservation community in the fight against extinction by working with IUCN, UN SDGs, UNDRIP, Reverse the Red, AZA knowledge.	Ensure decisions include inputs from contemporary science and traditional	Equip all team members to share, inspire and engage our guests and community with deep connections to the animals in our care, the challenges they face and actions they can take to protect them
	Ensure team members feel welcome, valuing diverse perspectives and experiences resulting in strong, supportive relationships among team members and a sense of community.	Make the hidden Zoo go extinct by increasing delivery of Zoo Conservation Science messaging, publications, thought leadership pieces and guest serving stories.	Use AI and big data to improve decisions in service of our 4-cares, with a focus on reproductive biology, conservation and animal wellbeing.	Implement the interpretive plan and share Zoo conservation science and the one health approach with new storytelling techniques and technologies.
Guests/Community	Adopt evolving diversity, accessibility and inclusion practices for staff and volunteers to better reflect and serve our communities. Be Toronto's Zoo while deepening links to Scarborough and Durham.	Expand Zoo conservation science funding mechanisms for onsite and offsite initiatives.	Become a "go-to" organization for governments, NGOs, media, academia and others for expertise on conservation science and animal wellbeing.	Make the Zoo a must-see destination, delivering customized experiences and facilities resulting in increased attendance and community engagement.
	Expand how we support Scarborough anchor institutions and align programming and infrastructure investments.	Develop deeper relationships with First Nations partners, honoring and enacting their wishes and Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations.	Develop a strategy and partnerships to measure the impact and effectiveness of our Zoo conservation science and education programs.	Connect every student in Toronto, York and Durham communities with conservation science experiences and make memories that last a lifetime.
	Bring people together- Work with partners to address mental health challenges and the crisis of loneliness facing our communities.		Build world class educational experiences and opportunities to create the next generation of Guardians	Update the 2022 Toronto Zoo Master Plan.
Climate Change/ Biodiversity Loss	Expand transit connections and options for team members and guests to access the Zoo site.	Monitor wildlife disease risk and live/share best practices.	Establish partnerships with global organizations to accelerate conservation impact.	Embrace an innovation culture to build the most technologically advanced Zoo in the world. Act as a demonstration site for climate mitigation, waste management and renewable energy projects/practices.
		Evaluate Zoo land management practices and the plant lives with purpose plan to promote healthy ecosystems and animal food security.	Build community literacy on the role of synthetic biology in conservation and the potential risk of genetically modified wildlife.	Embrace the arts to improve guest experience and make new connections between climate change, biodiversity loss and communities.