

## **Toronto Zoo Indigenous Relations - Update on 2024 Activities**

**Date:** September 16, 2024

**To:** Board of Management of the Toronto Zoo

**From:** Director, Indigenous Relations

**Wards:** All

### **SUMMARY**

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This report updates the Toronto Zoo Board of Management on 2024 initiatives led by Toronto Zoo's Indigenous Relations.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The Director, Indigenous Relations recommends that:

1. The Board of Management at the Toronto Zoo receive this report for information.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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There is no financial impact resulting from the adoption of the recommendations in this report.

### **DECISION HISTORY**

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On May 31, 2024, the Board of Management of the Toronto Zoo adopted the report establishing the Toronto Zoo Indigenous Advisory Circle. [Agenda Item History - 2024.ZB10.4 \(toronto.ca\)](#)

On October 23, 2023, the Board of Management of the Toronto Zoo adopted a Strategic Framework for Indigenous Relations at your Toronto Zoo. [Agenda Item History - 2023.ZB6.8 \(toronto.ca\)](#)

On October 23, 2023, the Board of Management of the Toronto Zoo adopted Values & Principles to guide Indigenous Relations at your Toronto Zoo.

[Agenda Item History - 2023.ZB6.3 \(toronto.ca\)](#)

## COMMENTS

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The following are highlights of 2024 activities led by the Toronto Zoo's Indigenous Relations unit.

### Conservation Science and Traditional Knowledge

#### *Caribou Biobanking Project*

In July, the Toronto Zoo signed a partnership agreement with Weenusk First Nation to provide local in-community support for the caribou biobanking project through community engagement and information sharing, caribou monitoring, and sample collection. The partnership agreement sets out commitments and responsibilities of the Zoo and First Nations, and includes funds to support a local staff person. Through this agreement, the Zoo will develop meaningful partnerships with First Nations communities who live on the lands where caribou migrate. The Zoo will also commit to educating community members on the project, ensuring free, prior and informed consent before undertaking sample collection, supporting the local community, maintaining open and transparent communication and respecting the cultural protocols of the community.

#### *Eastern Massassauga Rattlesnake Program*

In partnership with Wildlife Preservation Canada, the Toronto Zoo has been working closely with First Nations in the Georgian Bay and Bruce Peninsula area as part of the Eastern Massassauga Rattlesnake Species Survival Plan (SSP). These partnerships include permissions to collect neonate snakes on First Nations lands, information sharing and integrating traditional land-based knowledge into the program. Wild neonate (baby) snakes are collected to create a conservation breeding population, and are collected from various locations at a prescribed distance apart from each other. By collecting newborn snakes in this way, we would have a minimal impact on the wild population and build a more genetically diverse ex situ breeding population.

### TZ Indigenous Logo

On June 20th, the new Toronto Zoo Indigenous logo was revealed. The logo was designed by Anishnaabe artist Adrienne Assinewai and depicts the iconic Toronto Zoo deer head as well as key species. This logo signifies our commitment to advancing truth and reconciliation, honour the Indigenous lands on which the Zoo sits, tell the stories of the animals in our care, and the importance of Indigenous worldviews and knowledge. The Indigenous logo reflects the Toronto Zoo's original logo and demonstrates how we are all related and interconnected and how we integrate traditional knowledge into our conservation work with Indigenous communities. The species highlighted in the Indigenous logo represent the Toronto Zoo's signature conservation programs - Eastern Loggerhead Shrike, Blandings Turtle, Eastern Massassauga Rattlesnake, Bison and Polar Bear.

The logo will be used throughout the year for branding and marketing, particularly on days of significance (Indigenous Peoples Month, National Day for Truth and Reconciliation), and to promote our strategic priority to braid traditional knowledge and conservation science. It will also be used for select merchandise in our Zootique gift shop.

## **Community Engagement**

### *Complimentary Admission*

In June, the Toronto Zoo implemented year-round complimentary general admission for First Nations, Inuit and Metis Peoples. This program is one way Toronto Zoo can build and strengthen relationships with First Nations, Inuit and Metis Peoples and advance reconciliation. This policy is consistent with other destination sites across Toronto, including the Royal Ontario Museum and the Art Gallery of Ontario.

### *Toronto Zoo Indigenous Advisory Circle*

Early in 2024, the Toronto Zoo Indigenous Advisory Circle (TZIAC) was established. This TZIAC meets bi-monthly and is comprised of 9 First Nations community members. The TZIAC provide advice on the Zoo's programs and initiatives that involve Indigenous communities and guide us on our journey in braiding traditional knowledge into our conservation programs. The TZIAC will also provide guidance on the Zoo's strategic priorities and storytelling framework through the Strategic Plan and Site-Wide Interpretive Plan development processes.

### *ENAGB - Family Day at the Zoo*

In August, the Toronto Zoo hosted 10 Indigenous families through ENAGB (Eshkiniigjik Naandwechigegamig), a Toronto based Indigenous youth and child services agency. The day combined elements of curricula offered to children through the Zoo's Parent and Tot program, combined with traditional knowledge-based activities, including songs, stories and a medicine walk along the First Nations Knowledge Trail. These activities will ultimately contribute to the development of a "two-eyed seeing" curriculum targeted towards young children that combines conservation science education with traditional knowledge.

## **Turtle Island Conservation**

### *Indigenous Summer Leadership Program (ISLP)*

From July-August 2024, two students from the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) Indigenous Summer Leadership Program were given the opportunity to gain employment experience at the Zoo. They not only were introduced to various branches such as Horticulture and Nutrition, and the valuable work they do, but gained valuable outreach experience through the Turtle Island Conservation program. Such outreach activities included an activity table for Sea Ice Day set up outside the Polar bear habitat, spreading awareness of the importance of Sea Ice to Indigenous communities in the arctic, updating content of the Seven Grandfather Teachings Walk and leading the guided tours with their updated material to visitors, as well assisting with Indigenous Relations staff with group events with external Indigenous partners.

### *Species At Risk Stewardship Project: Indigenous Youth Guardians Camp & Summit (IYGCS)*

With the assistance of the ISLP students, research and planning of an engagement strategy to promote the project to Indigenous youth within the three First Nation communities who share lands with the three target species at risk - Blanding's Turtle, Eastern Small-footed myotis & Eastern Massasauga rattlesnake. The next phase of this strategy is to visit the First Nations (Hiawatha First Nation, Georgina Island First Nation and Saugeen Ojibway Nation) and engage the youth with this new program and get them excited to sign up for the camp, taking place in 2025 & 2026.

### **Anticipated activities October - December 2024**

The following are highlights of planned Indigenous Relations activities for October to December 2024:

#### *Eagle Feather Ceremony*

A ceremony will be held in early October with partner First Nations to transfer eagle feathers shed by Toronto Zoo's two resident bald eagles. Eagle feathers are sacred items for First Nations People, who gift them according to their own Nation's protocol and teachings. In partnership with the Toronto Zoo Indigenous Advisory Circle, we will also be developing a protocol for responding to requests for eagle feathers.

#### *Framework for Honouring Animals*

Over the past two years, the Toronto Zoo has commemorated and held ceremonies for several animals in our care who have passed away. These ceremonies support our staff and volunteers and provide opportunities to connect these animals with the communities from which they come. Our intention is to create a framework for celebrating the lives of animals in our care when they pass away, and for it to become part of Toronto Zoo's health and wellness program.

#### *Indigenous Procurement*

In cooperation with the Zoo's Finance and Procurement teams, a social procurement policy is being developed and anticipated to be brought to the Zoo board by the end of 2024. This policy will include specific processes and provisions for working with Indigenous vendors.

### **CONTACT**

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### **SIGNATURE**

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