

Strategic Initiatives and Guest Engagement Update

Date: October 1, 2026

To: Board of Management of the Toronto Zoo

From: Chief Operations Officer

Wards: All

SUMMARY

This report provides the Board of Management with an update on key strategic initiatives led and supported by the Zoo Operations Division that advance the Guardians of Wild Strategic Plan (2025-2028). The report highlights early performance of Glow in the Wild, the implementation of complimentary school field trips for publicly funded Toronto schools, and the significant attendance, engagement and revenue opportunities generated through the birth of Maple, the Zoo's pygmy hippo calf.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chief Operations Officer recommends that:

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

FINANCIAL IMPACT

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

DECISION HISTORY

There is no decision history available for this item.

COMMENTS

Glow in the Wild

Glow in the Wild, the Zoo's new nighttime experience, launched this fall in support of the Guardians of Wild Strategic Plan (2025–2028) and its WOW for Good area of focus. With one of our five priority initiatives in the Strategic Plan being: make the Zoo a must-see destination, delivering customized experiences and facilities resulting in increased attendance and community engagement we are pleased to report that Glow in the Wild is currently meeting revenue and attendance targets.

In its first full month of operation, Glow in the Wild welcomed more than 21,000 attendees. Overall, gross revenues exceeded \$845,000 in the first full month of operation, demonstrating the broader revenue impact of the experience across multiple areas of the Zoo.

Complimentary School Field Trip Pilot

Another one of the five priority initiatives in the Strategic Plan was to 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. This fall, with the financial support of the City of Toronto, the Zoo launched the pilot project for complimentary school field trips for publicly funded schools in Toronto.

School field trip bookings to date have 465 school groups booked through December 31, 2026 totaling 32,579 guests. Of that total, 355 groups totaling 22,939 guests are from Toronto schools booked for complimentary admission.

Current bookings represent a more than 50% increase in school attendance compared with the same period last year. The Learning & Engagement team has also seen an increase in teachers adding paid programming to their class visits, demonstrating how complimentary admission can free up limited school budgets for enhanced educational experiences during their visit.

Pygmy Hippo Maple Engagement and Revenue Impact

Since the birth of a pygmy hippo calf in early August, the Zoo has experienced significant global media as well as significant social media attention. From the day she was born she has become a very popular ambassador for her species, capturing hearts around the world. Announcing her very Canadian name, Maple, and also leaning into iconic Canadian brands and products to measure her height and weight has also become a very popular way to gain attention in both traditional and social media. The Zoo's Retail Operations has introduced 'Maple' merchandise earning over \$30,000 in sales to date.

On social media, Maple-specific content has generated more than 1.65 million engagements and 23.7 million impressions to date. Traditional media attention has been equally significant, with more than 995 media mentions, resulting in a potential audience reach of more than 1.2 billion over 60 days. Together, this coverage demonstrates the significant national and international attention Maple continues to generate for the Zoo.

Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate how strategic programming, increased access and compelling wildlife stories can drive attendance, deepen community engagement and generate incremental revenue. The Operations Division will continue to identify opportunities that advance the Guardians of Wild Strategic Plan while strengthening the Toronto Zoo's position as a must-see destination.

CONTACT

Jennifer Tracey
Chief Operations Officer
jtracey@torontozoo.ca
416-392-5936

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Jennifer Tracey
Chief Operations Officer