

VI. CONSERVATION



Conservation

The Edmonton Valley Zoo has identified conservation as one of its five key focus areas within the Strategic Framework. Under that umbrella, the Zoo has prioritized four strategic conservation objectives to help focus its conservation efforts:

- Conserve North America's parkland wildlife and ecosystems;
- Become a leader in cold climate species conservation;
- Inspire conservation action by our partners, visitors and community and;
- Implement and showcase resilient green practices for climate mitigation adaptation, and biodiversity benefits.

Climate resiliency and sustainability will be further explored starting on page 169, so this section will focus primarily on how the Master Plan supports the first three objectives.

ZOOS HAVE A CRITICAL ROLE IN WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

Modern and progressive zoos have grown significantly in their role as conservation organizations in the past few decades. Accredited zoos play a vital role in global wildlife conservation by acting as safe havens for endangered species and hubs for cutting-edge scientific research. Through carefully managed breeding programs, these institutions help preserve genetic diversity and prevent the extinction of species threatened by habitat loss, climate change, and human activity. By conducting studies on animal behavior, genetics, and health, zoos contribute valuable data to inform conservation strategies.

Accredited zoos also lead education and outreach efforts, inspiring millions of visitors to care about wildlife and empowering them to take action for conservation. Additionally, zoos collaborate with governments, NGOs, and field researchers to support reintroduction programs, protect natural habitats, and combat challenges faced by wildlife, making them indispensable allies in safeguarding biodiversity for future generations.

Zoos leverage their physical sites to further their conservation mission. Habitat designs mimic natural ecosystems, ensuring the physical and psychological wellbeing of animals while enabling research and education. Many zoos have dedicated facilities, whether on their main site or in offsite locations that support breeding programs for endangered species, as well as scientific studies on reproduction, genetics, and disease prevention.

AZA CONSERVATION INITIATIVES

The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) prioritizes conservation in its accreditation standards and policies and provides resources to member organizations within this space. Further information about the AZA conservation initiatives can be found at (aza.org/conservation). Member zoos also participate in collaborative international programs such as Species Survival Programs (SSPs) and Saving Animals From Extinction (SAFE) initiatives that promote global cooperation between zoos in support of wildlife conservation. The Canada’s Accredited Zoos and Aquariums (CAZA) has also further prioritized conservation by expanding the conservation-related accreditation standards that member institutions are held accountable for upholding.

CONSERVATION INSPIRATION

Zoos serve as ambassadors for wildlife by educating the public about the importance of conservation and fostering an emotional connection with nature. Through nature-based experiences and animal interactions, zoos build empathy towards animals and the environment, a prerequisite for inspiring behaviour change and conservation action. Zoos have shifted away from recreation towards compassionate understanding, thus bridging the gap between public experience and conservation. Zoos allow people the opportunity to discover species from around the world that they would likely have no exposure to, as well as deepen their relationships with the biodiversity in their own backyards. This local/global message helps visitors see the world as a more connected place, where the actions we take in our daily lives have impacts felt around the world.

ECOSYSTEM ADVOCATES

The Edmonton Valley Zoo serves an important role as a community and province-wide resource highlighting the importance of wildlife and wildlife conservation education within the North Saskatchewan River valley. The Master Plan builds on this with space dedicated to telling the local, contextual story of the Zoo within the Central Parkland Natural Subregion, and then expands on that story with narratives that transport visitors across Canada and around the world.





BURROWING OWL

HOW DOES THE MASTER PLAN SUPPORT THE STRATEGIC CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES?

The Master Plan site organization and interpretive framework align with the Conservation strategic objectives to ensure the site infrastructure and experience create an atmosphere where the EVZ can demonstrate its conservation commitments and leadership and ignite passion for conservation in the community. The plan creates increased capacity and dedicated space for onsite conservation initiatives including breeding, limited and intentional rescue or rehabilitation, research, and conservation education and engagement. In addition, the zoo is exploring acquiring off-site land in the near future to utilize for conservation breeding.

The following pages are an overview of the priorities and actions focused on the first three Strategic Framework Conservation Objectives, and how the Master Plan supports those tactics. This section integrates decisions made by the EVZ leadership team with the Master Plan approach to ensure synergy between the Master Plan and the direction the Zoo has established.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1

CONSERVE NORTH AMERICA’S PARKLAND
WILDLIFE AND ECOSYSTEMS



Protecting our “home” (Edmonton River Valley)



Returning endangered species back into the wild



In-situ conservation of native wildlife and spaces



Supporting wildlife rescue/rehab initiatives

HOW DOES THE MASTER PLAN
SUPPORT THESE PRIORITIES?

The Master Plan intentionally creates dedicated space for establishing a sense of place for the Edmonton Valley Zoo. Native plants, interpretive art and signage through the constructed wetland in the parking lot provide an opportunity to feature local wildlife and ecosystem stories, with the intention of infusing Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge, language, and creative expression into this space. The central spine draws visitors through the parking lot, connecting the Zoo with the surrounding park. The entry plaza is a gathering space that sets the tone for the journey guests are about to go on, with signage helping guests understand more of the context of the Zoo within the Central Parkland Natural Subregion.

The Nature Learn & Play Zone inspires the next generation of conservationists to connect with local wildlife through play and up-close viewing. The zone introduces visitors to playful, charismatic local species, building appreciation for Edmonton’s backyard biodiversity. Plants are included as well, with native/ local flora integrated in the landscape design and through sculpture.

The Master Plan expands the facilities for conservation breeding and translocation programs for small fauna. The Zoo currently plays a role in the conservation of Canada’s wildlife as part of the efforts to save the Northern Leopard frog. These facilities (currently housed in the Leopard Frog Trailer) receive a more permanent home in the

Conservation Education Centre with dedicated indoor laboratory space (with visitor viewing and education opportunities) and bio-secured outdoor space. These spaces are further activated for visitors through interpretive signage, climbable sculptures, and digital technology.

In consideration of the requirements and regulations governing ex situ programs, EVZ is currently best suited to consider smaller local species ranging from amphibians, fish or invertebrates. The Master Plan functional program includes space in the Bug & Butterfly Pavilion and the Conservation Education Centre to expand the ex-situ breeding program work, when the EVZ identifies appropriate species. The EVZ focus prioritizes Canadian species at risk that have a local connection and will leverage opportunities to collaborate with other Canadian institutions through CAZA and AZA Conservation Networks.

For the EVZ to expand its conservation breeding programs further, it will require more dedicated space that reflects the unique needs these programs and animals have for quiet, secluded space. Animals that are going to be reintroduced to the wild have distinct needs from animals that will remain in human care to reduce habituation and better prepare them for life without intervention. The EVZ looks to explore opportunities to acquire additional land that can support these needs, in addition to providing

more space to quarantine animals and grow the browse program. While that space is not currently included in the Master Plan at this time, the plan recommends this avenue be further explored to allow the EVZ the opportunity to grow its conservation breeding and future translocation initiatives.

As the conservation arm of the EVZ grows, the opportunities to pursue conservation initiatives and partnerships expands. The EVZ is keen to engage with partners in field work and research that aligns and advances shared conservation priorities along with supplying hands-on educational development for staff. The EVZ can continue to leverage its relationships with governmental and non-governmental conservation organizations, academic and other CAZA and AZA accredited institutions to collaborate on both in-situ and ex-situ conservation projects

Many of the habitats identified in the Master Plan are suitable to support animal residents in need of a home due to circumstances preventing their return to the wild. Collaboration between the Zoo and governmental partners such as Alberta Fish and Wildlife is already established. The Zoo’s animal care leadership team is empowered to make decisions on if an animal is a suitable fit based on their individual circumstances.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2

BECOME LEADERS IN COLD CLIMATE CONSERVATION



Become leaders in cold climate species conservation education leading to action



Provide cold climate species conservation support globally



Partner with local climate leaders to help promote climate adaptation and mitigation activities both on and off site for the benefit of wildlife.

HOW DOES THE MASTER PLAN SUPPORT THESE PRIORITIES?

The Master Plan aligns with the EVZ goal of leadership in cold climate conservation education with a full site zone dedicated to circumpolar species and ecosystems. Coastal Arctic expands on the success of the Arctic Shores facility by establishing state-of-the-art facilities that will welcome both iconic species such as polar bears and Arctic foxes as well as lesser-known keystone species such as Arctic cod, lumpfish and aquatic invertebrates.

The Arctic Gallery is an immersive experience that draws those species stories together to help visitors understand complex ecosystem interactions and how challenges like climate change, habitat loss, and industrialization are impacting the Arctic and the role we can all play in finding solutions. Coastal Arctic is unique within Canadian zoological institutions in providing a holistic, circumpolar look at arctic conservation, instead of solely focusing on Canadian landscapes. The space explores both aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, reinforcing the big-picture connections between land and water. EVZ is already an Arctic Ambassador Centre through Polar Bears International (PBI), providing access to PBI resources for education programming and resources. Coastal Arctic provides a greater platform for those programs to occur by connecting visitors with animal residents that are ambassadors for their ecosystems and wild counterparts.

Coastal Arctic expands the EVZ role in conserving arctic species by opening doors to expanded partnerships, participation in collaborative conservation programs, and building capacity as a research hub. Through the Master Planning process, preliminary discussions have occurred with NGOs (ex. Polar Bears International), other zoological institutions (Assiniboine Park Zoo and the Leatherdale International Polar Bear Conservation Centre) and academic institutions (University of Alberta, Concordia University) on the opportunities for the EVZ to grow its impact in cold climate species conservation.

The Master Plan aligns with City of Edmonton climate resiliency and adaptation strategies. With Edmonton’s more northern position, the increase in average temperature is occurring faster than the global average. As a major public destination, the EVZ connects directly with the public and can share the work that is occurring at the Zoo and within the larger City organization in this space. The EVZ can leverage its powerful voice and reputation as a leader in ‘walking-the-walk’ on climate resiliency to promote climate mitigation activities through onsite activations, online communications, and hosting events such as lectures and education programs. As one of only six Polar Bears International Arctic Ambassador Centers in Canada, the educates visitors about the effects of a warming climate on northern biodiversity and climate action.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3

INSPIRE CONSERVATION ACTION BY OUR PARTNERS, VISITORS, AND COMMUNITY



Inspire conservation action through the integration of behaviour change initiatives into all education programs



Improved conservation action-oriented visitor education



Improved conservation focused education events and community engagement that promote conservation action



Improved conservation focused permanent signage and materials that provide solutions for people to employ.



Conservation fundraising

HOW DOES THE MASTER PLAN SUPPORT THESE PRIORITIES?

The Master Plan Interpretive Framework integrates these priorities into the Call-to-Action messaging. Structured around themes of Community, the framework aligns with the *Connect. Care. Conserve.* umbrella concepts to introduce messages that deepen visitor relationships with the land locally, build understanding around and appreciation of the role of the EVZ in conservation, and inspire action that will have rippling global impacts.

The *Connect.* section communicates local community messages that encourage visitors to help sustain biodiversity in Edmonton or their own home place. Under the *Care.* umbrella, the messaging focuses on becoming part of the EVZ community and the role that the zoos play in conservation. In the *Conserve.* section, the Call-to-Action messaging expands to a global community scale, sharing and understanding conservation impacts around the world.

Interpretive signage that supports these messages should be targeted and accessible to the EVZ visitor audience. Distilling complex issues and research into tangible, relatable material is an art, but essential to encouraging visitors to engage with the material and not feel overwhelmed or as though the issues are too complex or out of reach.

The Master Plan also creates focal sites for conservation narratives to take centre stage. The Conservation Education Centre and Conserve Outposts are dedicated to educating and inspiring visitors with the EVZ conservation initiatives. Species in these spaces are ambassadors for the challenges faced by wildlife around the world and the interdisciplinary conservation efforts that are able to sustain a more hopeful future. These spaces also provide opportunities to host events such as conservation symposiums, public awareness and engagement events, or action campaigns.

The Master Plan is also a tool to help further fundraising efforts by demonstrating the EVZ direction, bringing the mission, vision and strategic priorities to life. Partners, sponsors, and donors see the big picture journey, feeling compelled to join the EVZ in fulfilling that vision. By encouraging visitors to *Connect.* with wildlife, appreciate and *Care.* for wild places and understand the importance of taking action to *Conserve.* local and global ecosystems, the Master Plan can help drive financial support from the community.