



Strategic Framework

VISION



A sustainable world where all living things thrive.

MISSION



Leverage our unique role to connect people with animals, care about wildlife, and conserve the natural world.

FOCUS AREAS AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

ANIMAL WELLBEING



Provide the highest standards of care for animals, ensuring both physical and psychological wellbeing while supporting conservation, research and educational goals.

CONSERVATION



Inspire and take conservation action to reverse the decline of vulnerable wildlife and unsustainable use of their habitats.

EDUCATION



Provide education that elevates our communities knowledge and conservation actions.

EXCEPTIONAL EXPERIENCE



Deliver a memorable, inclusive, and engaging guest experience that wows and connects people with animals and the natural world.

ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE



Cultivate an environment and culture that ensures our people excel and our physical assets and finances are sustainable.

Master Plan Guiding Principles

CITY PLAN GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Edmonton Valley Zoo, as part of the City of Edmonton, looked at the City Plan six guiding principles of Belong, Live, Thrive, Access, Preserve and Create in the development of the Master Plan. The Master Plan integrates these through a zoological and visitor lens.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE MASTER PLAN

The following principles emerged during the Master Planning process to inform and guide the development of the Master Plan. These resonant themes and values are articulated through a zoological lens in the Master Plan, and set enduring standards for how the plan is implemented in the future.

PLAN FOR WELLBEING - ANIMALS AND PEOPLE

Animal wellbeing is a high priority for EVZ, and is a foremost consideration of the Master Plan. Animals must be provided with control, choice, and complexity, and immersive and spacious habitats that have the flexibility to change their experiences and provide stimulating enrichment. Animal Wellbeing is defined by AZA as a state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy, and nurtured by zoos providing lifelong opportunities for animals to thrive. AZA provides a Strategic Framework for zoos to chart a course forward in a cooperative effort to advance animal wellbeing by:

- Cultivating a culture of wellbeing
- Enhancing lives
- Raising the bar
- Building partnerships
- Furthering credibility

Wellbeing is similar for people, and EVZ also values its staff, volunteers, and visitors. The Master Plan fosters partnerships and collaborations, allows for staff and volunteer growth opportunities and a sense of purpose, and provides for a rich visitor experience and level of satisfaction.

CONNECT PEOPLE WITH ANIMALS

A focus of the EVZ mission is to connect people with animals and there is no better way than for visitors to have an in-person and intimate experience with an animal, by experiencing closeup views of a species, watching a keeper provide health care, or learning compelling facts from an interpreter or docent. EVZ embraces the growing movement to tell stories about animals in an intentional way to foster empathy so that guests can perceive, understand, and care about the experiences and perspectives of an animal.

There is a concept called 'kincentric ecology' which is "awareness that life in any environment is viable only when humans view the life surrounding them as kin." The zoo's ability to show visitors the interconnectedness of all lifeforms creates the opportunity to highlight the symbiotic relationship between people and wildlife within the context of shared environments and caring for those shared places

CREATING WOW

Word of mouth. Going viral. Getting clicks. WOW experiences are about exceeding the visitor's expectations. These moments are created when visitors are captivated by the animals, understand your messaging, and share your story with others. In retail terms, it is about delivering extraordinary customer experience. By giving visitors the face-to-face experiences they can't get anywhere else, you create the opportunity to share the Zoo's conservation stories and inspire the next generation of conservation champions.

LANDSCAPE IMMERSION

Landscape immersion brings the guest into the animal's natural habitat. For animals, landscape immersion creates an environment with a wide range of behavioural enrichment opportunities that let animals express themselves. Visitors are sensory-immersed in the same landscape as the animal and are given an opportunity to understand and develop awe and respect for the animal. This immersion also highlights the Zoo's conservation message and its leadership role in the wider Edmonton community.

CONNECT WITH COMMUNITY

The City of Edmonton's Guiding Principle is to create a community to connect people to what matters to them and includes caring about environmental systems. The EVZ seeks to be the community's zoo and inspire pride in Edmontonians.

The Zoo's animal population comes from various parts of the globe and creates opportunities for the Zoo to share stories of the animal, the conservation challenges of the animal's native environment, and parallels to conservation efforts of similar animals local to Alberta and to Canada.

CELEBRATE EDMONTON'S CLIMATE

The EVZ will fully embrace the extremes and variability of Edmonton's climate and focus on becoming an all-season zoo. Animal residents will largely be selected that thrive in the local climate and be outdoors all year long, including in the cold winters. Spaces with warming and cooling features will be provided for visitors throughout the zoo, and guest amenities and exciting indoor experiences will be added to the outer zoo to grow visitation in the extreme cold and extreme hot times of the year. Consideration will also be given populating the zoo with species that are active year-round and ways for guests to view a small population of tropical species or significant conservation animals that need to be indoors for a period of time.

EMBRACE THE RIVER VALLEY

The Zoo is one of the primary touchpoints for the City's populace to engage with, and recreate in, the River Valley. As a neighbour, the Zoo has a responsibility to ensure that it does not impact, but instead, enhances the valley's natural systems through best practices. One example is the proposed constructed wetland and boardwalk in the Zoo's parking area that cleans and slowly releases stormwater into the river. The boardwalk will highlight, via interpretive panels, the Zoo's role in the wetland and how it is part of the river's hydrology.

INSPIRE CONSERVATION ACTION

The Zoo's Northern Leopard Frog program is a good example of the axiom, "think globally, act locally." As a conservation leader in Alberta, the Zoo has the ability to both tell conservation stories from around the world and show visitors how to take an active part in the conservation at home and demonstrate how little actions become great movements.

PROTECT/STEWARD WILD PLACES AND WILD SPACES

The Zoo has the opportunity, through partnerships with the post-secondary institutions, conservation groups, and volunteer organizations, to be the leader of the Edmonton River Valley's stewardship. The intent is to maximize the benefit of being located in the valley by capitalizing on the Zoo staff's skill and talent to care for the River Valley.

SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Environmental sustainability is a high priority for EVZ and shaped the development of the Master Plan. The COE requires facilities to meet a minimum Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Silver certification and has Climate and other environmental policies. The EVZ developed a sustainability plan in accordance with AZA Green Guidelines (Vol 1) and continues to prioritize work within this framework. Specific sustainability strategies that benefit wildlife are also considered, such as bird-friendly design and Dark Skies Initiative.

Climate resilience planning is also an important consideration as the climate evolves. Animals and plants that are best-suited for Edmonton's climate now, may change in the future as plant hardiness zones change and temperature extremes increase. Species obtainability may also be impacted by this, so habitats are designed to be flexible and accommodate other species. More detail can be found in the Sustainability and Climate Resilience section of this report.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Edmonton's population in 2024 was 1,567,620 people. DEI as a principle ensures the Master Plan reflects people of different ages, races, ethnicities, abilities, disabilities, genders, religions, cultures and sexual orientations. It also covers people with diverse backgrounds, experiences, skills and expertise. The Zoo offers a welcoming and communal meeting point where visitors can safely observe animals and engage with nature, reflect on the Zoo's role in the Edmonton community and be offered opportunities to include themselves in the Zoo's conservation efforts.

CIRCULATION AND WAYFINDING

Circulation systems are the physical pathways and roadways that help us move from point A to point B. Wayfinding is the signage and prompts that directs us from point a to point b. Together, these two elements help visitors orient themselves to their location, gives them clear directions on where they want to go and what they will encounter along the way. Clear wayfinding design is intuitive and nonverbal. It also helps users by reducing stress and increasing the enjoyment of their visit.

THE STORY ALL WEAVES TOGETHER!

- Tell consistent and compelling stories
- Turn your visitors into your storytellers
- Elevate knowledge in all forms to inspire Conservation Action





Master Planning considerations

During the Master Planning process, the concepts helped to create a framework, criteria and prioritization guideline to enhance the animal resident planning tool moving forward and align the decisions with the resulting 15-year Master Plan.

EVZ PRIORITIES

The EVZ's strong focus on animal wellbeing was a primary shaper of the Master Plan and the resulting new Animal Resident Plan in the following ways:

- Focusing on climate-appropriate species and prioritizing all-season care;
- Focusing on species that were active during the day;
- Including animal care provisions and amenities to care for all stages of life, from maternity to geriatric needs;
- Commitment to care for the Asian elephant, Lucy, until the end of her life and providing her the best possible care;
- Growing the zoo's conservation program and ex-situ and in-situ efforts;
- Growing the zoo's research contributions and partnerships with post secondary institutions and others and;
- Providing ample space for species and their needs and ensuring that animals will have control, choice and complexity in their habitats and holding spaces.

EVZ's commitment to caring for Lucy and the review of Polar Bear Feasibility considerations shaped the Master Plan. Since both of these species have significant spatial requirements, ensuring ample space was provided for them before making other species decisions was an important consideration.

AZA ANIMAL RESIDENT PLANNING GUIDANCE

The EVZ maintains CAZA Accreditation and is on the Pathway to AZA Accreditation, so AZA guidance was reviewed relative to updating the Animal Resident Planning Tool and Plan. AZA stipulates that an Animal Resident Plan is intended to thoughtfully assess regularly the reason for having each taxon in residence, provides justification for all species, and the number of individuals or groups in the plan. Although AZA has core requirements, it is encouraged that the plan be unique to the institution and reflect EVZ's mission and vision. Some of the following criteria must be included in the plan:

- Special welfare considerations;
- Status in the wild;
- Status in zoos and aquariums;
- AZA TAG (Taxonomic Advisory Group) Regional Collection Plan recommendations;
- Existence and priorities of cooperative management programs;
- Ability to maintain species in a physically, psychologically, & socially healthy environment;
- Exhibit value;
- Exhibit suitability including climate considerations and;
- Need for husbandry and other behavioral research

Animal planning decisions are significant for the sustainability of the AZA's cooperatively managed Species Survival Plan (SSP). AZA considers the plan a core requirement and provides resources for developing the plan. The plan is a living document that should be updated at least every five years.

AZA ACCREDITATION CONSIDERATIONS

The EVZ's goal to obtain AZA Accreditation early in the Master Plan implementation drove some key decisions in the animal resident planning, and for concept direction and sequencing. AZA upgrades were targeted for completion in the first three years to meet the accreditation goal. Many of these improvements were started immediately while the Master Planning process moved forward, and there were decisions made about some species early-on:

- The Master Plan will include new indoor and outdoor facilities for a smaller number of primates than currently housed;
- The EVZ has prioritized expanding indoor and outdoor space for the Asian elephant and will phase out Grevy zebra to accommodate expansion and;
- The EVZ has prioritized expanding raptor space for fewer birds and phasing out tropical species.

The AZA improvement schedule also impacts the sequencing of projects in the Master Plan. See the Implementation Plan starting on page 174 for more detail.



AMBASSADOR ANIMAL PROGRAM

The EVZ updated its Ambassador Animal Program during the Master Planning process, which is important to understand which species would be considered Ambassadors and ensure that standards be met in the Master Plan related to these species. The focus will be on small animals with species like reptiles and amphibians primarily housed in the existing EdVenture Lodge and the new Conservation Education Centre. The Urban Farm goats will remain with a contact yard, and this will be the only place that the public can touch animals.

RESILIENCE STRATEGIES

Although careful consideration, research, and thought went into creating the Animal Resident Plan and Master Plan, new opportunities and unforeseen challenges will likely arise over time. It is intended that there is flexibility of species selection to accommodate circumstances such as species unobtainability or unique opportunities to obtain a species previously thought unobtainable that would work well with the concept and the Master Plan. There are some animal species that may be challenging to obtain, but a decision was made to move forward with them as they have special significance for the Master Plan and the EVZ.

ANIMAL RESIDENT PLANNING TOOL

Review of the "Institution Collection Plan Edmonton Valley Zoo 2023" in Phase I of the Master Planning process by Jones & Jones and Care for the Rare revealed a well-structured and comprehensive approach recognizing animal welfare, conservation status, availability, and other key considerations in line with CAZA and AZA criteria and standards. It was suggested that a more quantifiable framework be created leading to a pass/fail scoring that would reduce the possibility of subjective bias and streamline the process. It was also recommended that updating the tool to capture the evolution of EVZ's conservation identity and addressing Alberta-specific conservation issues would strengthen the tool.

The EVZ Animal Resident Planning Tool considers recommended CAZA and AZA criteria, reflects the uniqueness of the EVZ, and provides a robust evaluation.

The following criteria are analyzed:

- Animal Welfare
- Institutional and Industry Priority
- Conservation Value
- Learning and Engagement Value
- Guest Experience Value
- Obtainability Effort
- Resource Allocation
- Scientific Value

There are several sub-criteria for each with detailed considerations and EVZ-specific considerations, including advancing their mission and aspects of the Master Plan. The Animal Resident Planning Tool is included in Appendix D.



POLAR BEAR FEASIBILITY - SUMMARY

As part of the Master Planning process, a Polar Bear Feasibility Study was conducted with the central questions being: Does the EVZ have the required capacity and resources to introduce Polar bears to the zoo, and considering multiple criteria, is the project viable and worth pursuing? The study results support moving forward to include Polar bears in the Master Plan.

The following were assessed:

- Logistical criteria including: spatial needs, staffing needs, animal care requirements, operational impacts and costs, technical requirements, and capital costs
- Support criteria include: conservation support, internal and stakeholder buy-in, and EVZ Animal Resident Planning tool support
- Opportunities including: conservation and climate science support and leadership, potential partnerships, climate and conservation education, Canadian outreach, increase in attendance and revenue
- Risks including: funding and obtainability

For the complete document, please see the Polar Bear Feasibility Report in Appendix G. See Business Case for additional information on the Coastal Arctic zone that includes the Polar bear.

