

Master Plan Concept

SITE ORGANIZATION AND INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORK

Zoological facilities use spatial and narrative organization systems to ensure their sites deliver high-quality guest experiences while operating efficiently and meeting the needs of the animals in their care. Cohesive, thematic site organization is also a requirement for AZA accreditation.

The Site Organization concept for the 2025 Edmonton Valley Zoo Master Plan rearranges the physical site organization to reflect the guiding principles and create cohesive, tangible, focused zones with appropriate habitats and species. The goal was to create a spatial arrangement that optimizes functionality, improves circulation and wayfinding, and navigates site constraints and logistical requirements. Excellent current facilities and amenities were leveraged and maintained, while new and enhanced exhibits and features focus on priority areas and underutilized space in the zoo. The zones focus on the geographic and/or ecological relationships between the resident species and their ecosystems.

The Master Plan Concept introduces an Interpretive Framework to help curate and structure the stories shared across the site to communicate the mission and vision of the organization. The framework provides the foundation for future work to develop the messages and content for different interpretive media to build empathy for nature and inspire action to sustain our planet.

The Site Organization and the Interpretive Framework serve different, but complementary purposes to form the Master Plan Concept.



Site Organization

The spatial arrangement of animal habitats, visitor amenity buildings, operational support facilities, and pathways emerged from progressive refinement of options during the collaborative workshops and resulted in a Site Organization Concept. The Concept addressed constraints, including buildings and habitats that were recently developed and are to be retained, site topography and trees, drainage and utilities. The site organization looks to maximize operational efficiency and circulation, improve guest flow, and expand amenities to address the seasonal nature of the current experience in the Edmonton climate.

The site layout reflects the Animal Resident Plan, integrating a degree of flexibility to reflect changes in animal obtainability. Habitats are sized for best practices and to exceed the minimum standards for zoological accreditation and include animal management facilities such as holding buildings and off-view habitats. Where possible, opportunities for mixed-species habitats have been identified. Guest amenities including food service, educational and interpretive spaces, rental spaces, washrooms, shelters, and experiential opportunities are further explored on page 106.

DEVELOPING THE ZONES

The site organization was developed through continuous refinement of concept options in the workshops, and reviewing the existing, recently developed habitats and their residents. Refinement of site organization into zones and species groupings was done by exploring ideas with the Zoo Project Team on potential species, ecosystems, and regions of the world that aligned with the Guiding Principles, Conservation goals, and Animal Resident Planning tools. The most appropriate sites were selected for the species with the largest spatial and most complex needs early in the process.

As the species groupings took shape, high-level ideas emerged that helped define distinct zones for the site, reflecting ecological and geographic relationships between the species, their ecosystems, or their ecology. The species/habitat choices strike a balance between highlighting Alberta/Canadian wildlife and ecosystem connections and introducing visitors to charismatic species from around the world that are ambassadors for their ecosystems. It was important that the zone concepts connect visitors with conservation stories on both local and global levels, inspiring guests to take steps to ensure a healthier planet.

The Site Organization Plan is shown on the next page.

FOCUS AREAS

ESTABLISHING SENSE OF PLACE

The EVZ is positioned within the North Saskatchewan River Valley (NSRV) and within the broader Central Parkland Natural Subregion. Grounding the visitor journey in the local context is key as it helps deepen appreciation and understanding of the natural and cultural heritage of the site and the broader connected ecosystem, supporting the Conservation Strategic Objectives. As stewards of their River Valley lands, the EVZ plays a critical role in communicating the importance of the surrounding ecosystem and taking and inspiring individual and community action to protect it. The site organization ensures the visitor experience begins with building understanding of the local context, landscape and species that call this region home.

UNIVERSAL CONNECTIONS

The high-level site organization ideas focused on two of the essential elements for life on earth – air and water. These two notions are universal connectors and have a significant impact on overall ecosystem health. The air and water concepts provide linkages between species and ecosystems and provide direct connections with climate and conservation science and action. In addition, the primary public pathway circulation spine connecting the zoo entry to the outer zoo, which was originally designed to demonstrate the journey of water, has been rebranded, Waterways to the World, to reflect this connection.

While there are air and water connections presented throughout the plan and proposed infrastructure, the concept has defined areas focused around one or the other. A zone in the inner zoo area is dedicated to life in the air – aerial and arboreal species – and the outer zoo zones are structured around three stories focused on global waterways - exploring the world's rivers, deltas and oceans. (see Focus Areas diagram on page 46.)

MASTER PLAN AREAS AND ZONES

Welcome and Parking

Nature Learn & Play

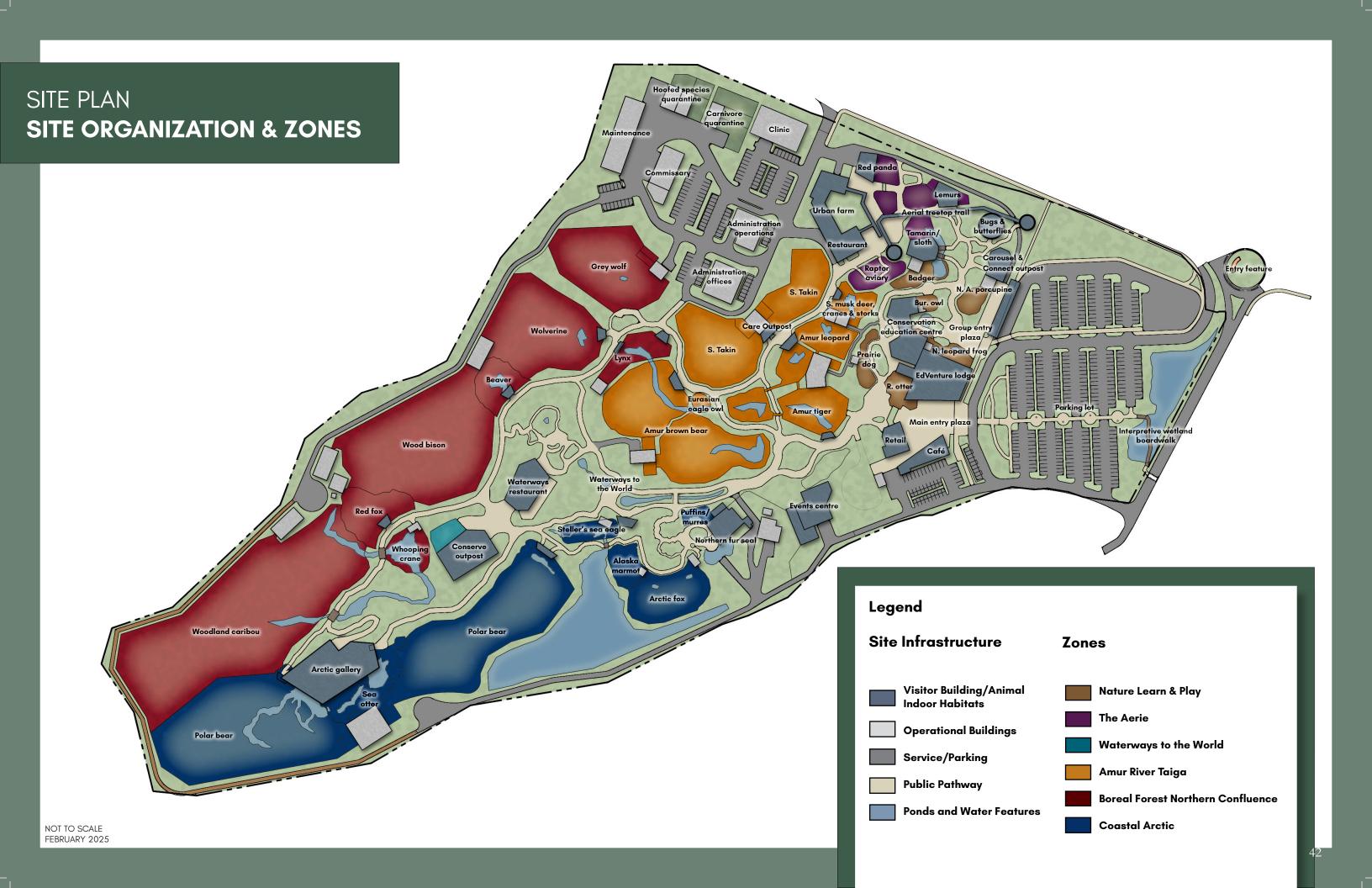
The Aerie

Waterways to the World

Amur River Taiga

Boreal Forest Northern Confluence

Coastal Arctic



Interpretive Framework

The Interpretive Framework structures the narrative journey to communicate the mission, vision, and strategic objectives of the Edmonton Valley Zoo to all audience segments using a variety of interpretive media and infrastructure across the site. The Framework is a conceptual tool used to help articulate the interpretive intent for a site and develop highlevel messaging that aligns with the strategic goals of the organization. The Interpretive Framework helps us decide at the Master Planning level what kinds of stories should support the future plan, and what stories might not be the best fit, ensuring the visitor is not overwhelmed by large volumes of disconnected messaging.

As a next step, the Framework should inform the development of a comprehensive Site Interpretive Plan at an early phase of the Master Plan implementation. Site Interpretive Plans dive into the next level of detail to create focused, targeted key messages and help a site curate the content including writing and graphics for signage, exhibits, digital infrastructure, and programs.

A visual of how the Interpretive Framework interacts with the Site Organization at the Master Plan level is shown on the next page.

UNDER THE UMBRELLA

The Edmonton Valley Zoo mission references three terms that have become a key identifier for the organization: *Connect. Care. Conserve.* These terms help distill the organization's strategic goals into digestible terms for the public audience, highlighting the Zoo's priorities in an accessible manner.

The Interpretive Framework creates a structure where sections of the Zoo are nestled under each term, like a conceptual umbrella to ensure the visitor experience reflects all three principles. While there is an overarching narrative or *Connect. Care. Conserve.* across the site, stories in each section curated under their focus umbrella concept, with dedicated site infrastructure (outposts) named for their respective terms (see diagram on page 45).

Under the *Connect* focus, visitors will encounter dynamic species through up-close viewing experiences or from unique vantage points, and build appreciation for the amazing species that call the River Valley region and other biodiversity hotspots home.

In the *Care* focus area, visitors are engaged with stories of how the Edmonton Valley Zoo team ensures the highest standards of wellbeing for all animals in their care, through husbandry, training, enrichment, diet and veterinary care. This section inspires visitors to care by building empathy for individual animals and their stories. The framework nestles the Administration and Back-of-House areas under the *Care* umbrella, as these areas may host tours, programs, and behind-the scenes moments and should be thoughtfully integrated into the story and may have interpretive signage. While functional in nature, they serve a powerful purpose in ensuring animals, people and the site are cared for.

Under the *Conserve* umbrella, the focus is on conservation leadership, highlighting initiatives, programs and actions that help sustain ecosystems and support a more hopeful future for life on Earth. Visitors will meet some of the planet's most at-risk species and learn more about our collective role in protecting them.

The *Connect. Care. Conserve.* thematic approach may not be immediately obvious to visitors, but it is a framing tool that helps craft the messaging across the site to ensure the visitor experience is rich, focused, and in alignment with the EVZ mission.

CALLS TO ACTION

The Interpretive Framework layers three Call to Action (CTA) strategies to encourage visitors to engage more deeply with the EVZ and be inspired to take actions for wildlife conservation. The CTA strategies align with the *Connect. Care. Conserve.* umbrellas, introducing a fourth 'C' theme of Community.

The *Connect* section communicates local community messages that encourage visitors to help sustain biodiversity in Edmonton or their own home place by connecting people with animals.

Under the *Care* umbrella, the messaging focuses on becoming part of the EVZ community and the role that the zoos play in conservation by encouraging visitors to care about wildlife.

In the *Conserve* section, the Call-to-Action messaging expands to a global community scale, sharing and understanding conservation impact around the world so that people will conserve the natural world.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SITE ORGANIZATION AND INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORK

The physical Site Organization and the Interpretive Framework interact to form two thematic layers that define the experience of the Edmonton Valley Zoo. The below diagram illustrates how the species, habitats, and zones form the Site Organization structure, while the Umbrella Concepts and Call to Action messages support the Interpretive Framework. Together, they form a rich, powerful visitor journey that is focused, cohesive and communicates the Zoo's mission and vision. The site diagrams on the following two pages illustrate how these concepts overlay the site.

Site Organization

Zone	Welcome & Parking	Nature Learn & Play	The Aerie	Amur River Taiga	Boreal Forest Northern Confluence	Coastal Arctic	Waterways to the World
Zone theme	Our place in the Edmonton River Valley	Engaging the next generation of conservationists	Up, up, up, we all go!	Journey to Asia's northern forests	Where the rivers meet	Life at the top of the world	All beings on Earth are connected through water
Zone primary focus	Establishing sense of place	Establishing sense of place	Universal connections air focus	Universal connections Water focus, air elements	Universal connections water focus	Universal connections Water focus, air elements	Universal connections water focus
Potential Species/ Habitats	Constructed wetland and LID facilities Interpretive boardwalk with Indigenous art elements Ambassador Animals	N. A. river otter	Lemurs, tortoise	Amur tiger	Canada lynx	Polar bear	Meltwater play
		Black-tailed prairie dog	Red pandas	Amur leopard	Woodland caribou	Sea otter	Beaver dam
		Badger	Aerial treetop trail	Siberian musk deer	Wolverine	Arctic fox	Water interactives
		Northern leopard frog	Bugs/Butterflies	Red-crowned crane	Red fox	Seals	Sculptures and art
		Turtles	Urban Farm	Oriental white stork	Beaver	Steller's sea eagle	Ambassador animals
		Burrowing owl	Aviary – owls, raptors	Sichuan takin	Whooping crane	Puffin/murres	
		N. A. porcupine	Golden lion tamarin	Amur brown bear	Gray wolf	Ptarmigan	
		Ambassador animals	Linne's two-toed sloth			Alaska marmot	
						Arctic invertebrates & fish	

Interpretive Framework

Key Idea

Goals

Sample Call to Action

Messages

Connect

Get closer, spark inquiry and build relationships with wildlife.

- Anchor the experience by establishing a sense of place in the Edmonton River Valley and Central Parkland Natural Subregion.
- Honour local Indigenous knowledge and relationships with the land.
- Connect with local wildlife to build relationships and respect for species that call the region home.
- Learn about and appreciate the biodiversity of the region and the conservation work happening to sustain regional ecosystems.
- Connect with charismatic wildlife by getting up close and encouraging parallel play and perspective-taking for

LOCAL COMMUNITY

- Stewardship of the River Valley/ Central Parkland Natural Subregion.
- Local conservation wins.
- Citizen science opportunities to sustain regional biodiversity

Care

Build love, empathy and respect for animals and their caretakers.

- Explore the pillars of animal wellbeing and how husbandry, enrichment and veterinary practices support high standards of welfare.
- Share individual animal stories that deepen our love for the animal and the species.
- Deepen understanding of Species Survival Plans and other initiatives that are working to sustain healthy animal populations under human care.
- Explore the important role of progressive, conservationfocused zoos in sustaining the future for species around the world.

ZOO COMMUNITY

- Join the EVZ community by supporting the zoo, becoming a member, donating.
- Be a champion for the EVZ by sharing the zoo story with friends and family and advocating for the role zoos play.

Conserve

Showcase conservation leadership, understand challenges and inspire action.

- Understand the challenges facing northern ecosystems around the world, drawing parallels between Canadian conservation and global issues - Canada's North/Asia's North
- Use the Waterways to the World as a connective thread between different ecosystems, reflecting the universal nature of water and how water impacts all life on Earth.
- Deepen understanding of climate change issues, presented through a lens of hope for the future through individual and community actions.

GLOBAL COMMUNITY

- Engage with EVZ conservation programs and sustainability initiatives.
- Inspire actions to reduce human footprint on ecosystems, including single-use plastic and water use.

