

Kansas City Zoo's

Conservation Strategic Plan



The Kansas City Zoo, a private, non-profit organization is operated in agreement with the Kansas City, MO Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners, partially funded by the Zoological District in Jackson and Clay Counties in MO, and is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

Situation Analysis

When starting to build the Conservation Strategic Plan in 2014, it became evident of the need for a focused outline guide to the conservation culture at the Zoo. There is great interest in weaving conservation into the fabric of the Zoo. More conservation messages are being delivered in Keeper chats and shows, educational programming, events and promotions. Conservation has always been a part of the Zoo's mission and there have been meaningful efforts, however, it needs to become a more prominent reason for existence.

Internal

Financial stability was necessary to begin to consider a long term conservation plan. With the passing of the Zoological District, the Zoo can look at directing and re-directing money and energies to fund and boost new conservation initiatives. Zoo District funds will not be used for conservation but to help to advance the Zoo's business stability and expand opportunities for guest amenities which in turn provide growth.

- Strengths:** There are current conservation programs in place
Staff is excited about conservation and sustainability at the Zoo
- Weaknesses:** Growing fast and sprinting to catch up with staffing
Can staff manage both daily operations and conservation opportunities?
No solid conservation program plan
- Opportunities:** Technological advances within the park allows for more efficient conservation messaging
The Zoo is large therefore there are void spaces that can be cleverly filled with conservation opportunities
Creating a conservation plan in which certain criteria must be met ensures "buy in" and "measurable impact"
- Threats:** Lack of endowment funds to operate if necessary
Employee retention to maintain continuity throughout programming

External

The Zoo needs to be a conservation leader in the community and engage guests to take conservation action. The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), the national accrediting organization, requires that all zoos are committed to conservation and education. In study after study it has been found that zoos and aquariums have a measurable impact on the conservation attitudes and understanding. Zoos need to be engaged in local, national and international communities to inspire citizens to conservation action. The Zoo should strive to be THE conservation advocate in the Kansas City region.

- Strengths:** Relatively low admission prices so add on for conservation funding hardly noticeable to general public
 Proven leadership and successes in properly managing funds and building a better Zoo making Donors want to donate
 ZooED programing is providing avenues into school districts where messages can be molded and acted upon
 Recent improvements are gaining regional draw and attention
- Weaknesses:** Residents in the Zoological District can vote out the tax support at any time
- Opportunities:** Can the Zoo be seen as an innovator and leader in conservation
 Increasing the Zoos participation in sustainable practices could better the Zoo's reputation in businesses and employment
- Threats:** Competition for philanthropic dollars both for additional Zoo expansions and from meaningful nonprofit services
 The Zoo not the only live animal or conservation venue in the Metro area, we have to continue building the "WOW" and provide opportunities for interaction

The Conservation Workshops

The Zoo's senior staff along with two seasoned professionals from the Conservation Breeding Specialist Group (CBSG) met several times over a year to reaffirm the Zoo's commitment to conservation. Accomplishments of the plan were listed and reviewed throughout the process to ensure that all hopes were realized.

Staff hoped the plan would:

- Create a realistic and affordable do-able plan
- Provide a sense of direction
- Be easily explained to all guests
- Position the Zoo as leaders in conservation
- Be impactful and boastful
- Be measurable to ensure the Zoo is making a difference
- Demonstrate that the Zoo is clearly responding to a need
- Encompass the entire Zoo and its mission
- Be sustainable

The first product from the workshops was the conservation vision.

We envision a world in which the Kansas City Zoo contributes significantly to preserving the diversity of species and conserving resources on earth while influencing others to do the same.

Goals, objectives and strategies of the conservation plan reflect the three themes in the vision:

1. Influencing others
2. Protecting species
3. Conserving resources

In addition, through these workshops, staff developed processes and criteria to prioritize conservation projects and to identify specific funding sources using “SMART” action steps.

Theme: Influencing Others

Goal 1: Use the Zoo to engage visitors and inspire/empower them to conservation action.

- In 10 years, 100% of the exhibits will incorporate conservation messages including calls to action
- All new guest-focused activities (exhibits, attractions, concessions, programs) include consideration of conservation messages and calls to action from the start of the planning process

Goal 2: Engage local, national and international communities and inspire/empower them to conservation action.

- Develop an external and internal communications plan that will include conservation messages and calls to action as appropriate
- Create logo/tag line for conservation messaging
- Effectively communicate KCZoo’s role as a conservation leader to employees, board, community, et al.

Goal 3: Advocate for relevant conservation policy at local, national and international level

- Support relevant conservation policy as defined by the Zoo's conservation vision
- Develop a conservation advocacy policy
- Create a committee with political connections to deliver messages and influence change in policy

Theme: Protecting Species

Goal 4: Support species conservation projects that are needed and effective

- Develop a three-year plan that identifies funding available on an annual basis
- Establish criteria and portfolio rules the conservation project proposals must follow
- Institute an "as doing business" category for animal welfare items

Theme: Conserving Resources

Goal 5: KCZoo's conservation work is financial sustainable

- Within the next 10-years, the Zoo will work toward a minimum of 3% of the operating budget will be put toward conservation

Goal 6: Sustainable Zoo Operations

- Develop a core team for sustainability at the Zoo
- Establish philosophy and criteria
- Conduct annual reviews and scoring successes