

STRATEGIC PLAN

Topeka Zoo & Conservation Center

2023-2027

topeka zoo
& conservation center

STRATEGIC PLAN

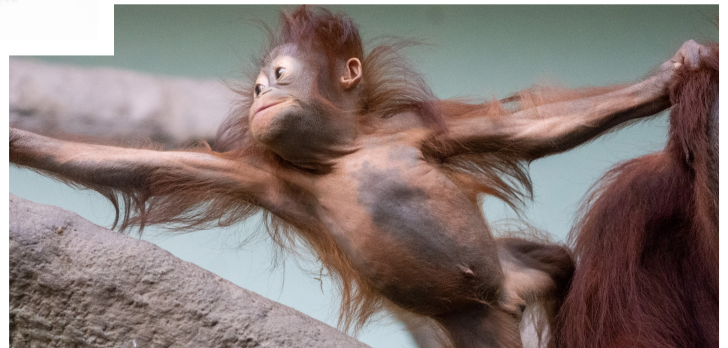
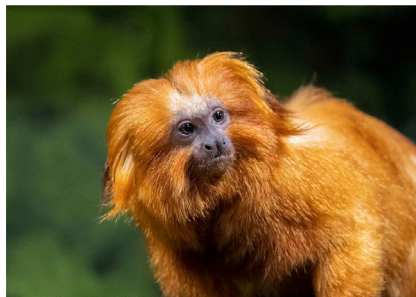
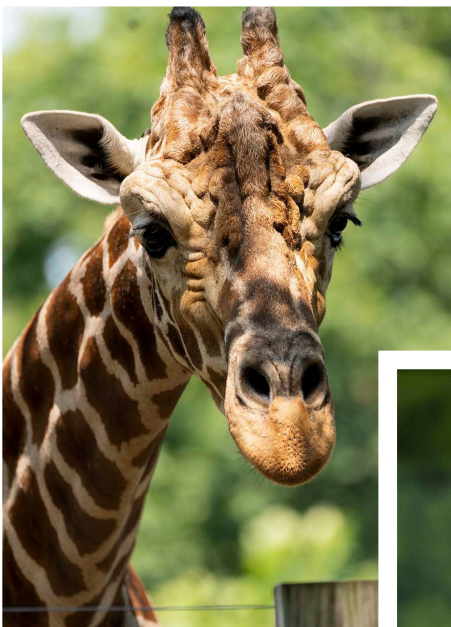
Introduction

Located in Shawnee County Kansas, the Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center is a cherished community destination. The zoo has a regional draw for its onsite attractions and its environmental education and citizen science programs. In 2022 the zoo achieved its modern era attendance record, yielding a market saturation point of 120% compared to its metropolitan statistical area.

During the period of 2010 to 2022, the Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center established and initiated a master plan, reformed its governance

into a public private partnership and established a designated sales tax to support some of its operating and capital needs.

Now operating as a true nonprofit and with completion of the first phase of the zoo's master plan, the Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center is forward focused on meeting its mission and vision.



Mission Statement

To enrich the community through wildlife conservation and education.

Vision Statement

We believe what we do changes the world. Every choice we make helps save the planet.

DEAI Statement

We are committed to ensuring everyone feels welcome and valued by striving to create an environment that is as diverse as the wild spaces we are trying to protect.



CORE VALUES

Our core values are our highest priorities, deeply held beliefs, and our core, fundamental driving forces. They are the heart of what our organization and our employees stand for. They form the foundation on which we perform work and conduct ourselves. In May of 2022, the Zoo's core values were modified to include tenants of DEAL.

Create

We have a culture that welcomes all. We build equitable experiences and relationships with our guests and team. We are innovative with education, wellness, and conservation. We cultivate memories, experience, and empathy.

Adapt

We listen and include others. We are flexible to accept change and changing priorities. We accept responsibility and we work well with others even in difficult circumstances.

Steward

We care for tomorrow today. We set good examples. We are honest in our communications and lead others well. We value diversity. We keep our promises. We provide education to our team and guests while we continue to educate ourselves. We protect our animals, our guests and our team.

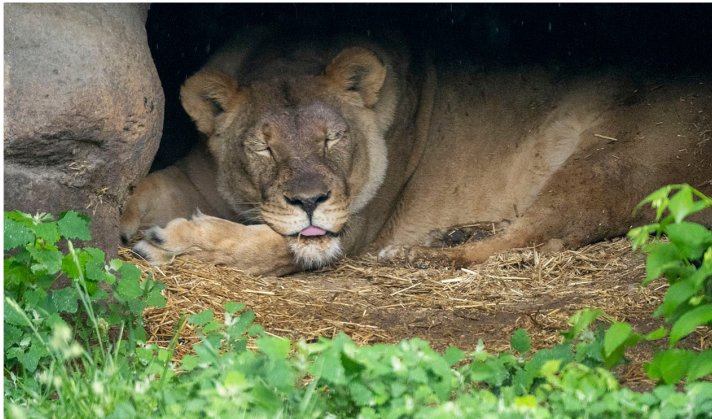
Transparent

We share information timely and accurately. We are trusted with confidential information. We have high ethical standards. We are authentic. We believe that transparency is the foundation for building trusting relationships. We value diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion.

STRATEGIC PLAN

Development

The initial development of this plan began in the summer of 2021. Soon after changing the governance model from public to private, the Zoo began asking questions about what its future would look like. Through a series of surveys and meetings with staff, board members, stakeholders, volunteers, and docents, desires of the organization began to become clear.



Plan Concept

The Zoo's strategic plan is intended to provide guidance to its vision through common direction. The Strategic Plan informs the Zoo's Master Plan and Business Plan. It's a map.

The Zoo's current vision statement, "We believe what we do changes the world. Every choice we make saves the planet," was coined in 2012. From the moment it was articulated, it felt good and aspirational; but not necessarily believable. More in control of its destiny now, the Zoo was able to begin visioning what a map to that vision might look like.

The map to the vision of the Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center is embedded in the idea of sustainability. The Topeka Zoo shares the United Nations' understanding of sustainability as, "Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

In 2015, every member nation of the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This blueprint for peace recognizes that if we are going to save the world's oceans and lands, we are going to have to end poverty, inequalities and other deprivations while at the same time improving health, education and economic growth. This holistic approach to saving the world is supported by the pillars of environmental protection, economic vitality and social equity. The three pillars are supported by 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

SUSTAINABILITY

Conservation through Sustainability

Today's needs are different. Change is going to have to be accomplished faster. For accredited zoos, taking a sustainability approach to conservation should be a natural progression. It should not devalue previous efforts but be an opportunity to maximize future opportunities. If we are going to expect better outcomes through our conservation efforts, we are going to have to do things differently.

Through this approach, clarity developed around the Zoo's vision and we began to see how we could change the world through sustainability initiatives.



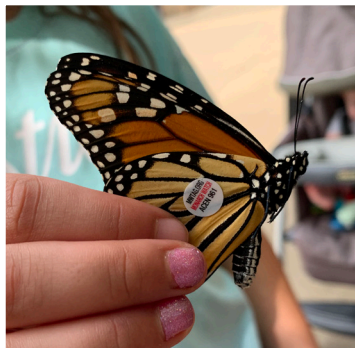
THROUGH THE LENS OF SUSTAINABILITY

Through the lens of sustainability and DEAI, the Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center has begun a journey of reimagining many of its structural programs including its leadership strategies, community engagement, programming, and infrastructure.



DEAI AND SUSTAINABILITY

DEAI and sustainability are very much intertwined. Prior to adopting sustainability as a guiding principle, the Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center began a process in the fall of 2021 to completely revamp its DEAI program. The Zoo's DEAI strategy is supported by a Board Statement and includes a staff-driven plan.



SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

The Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center identified the following five sustainability initiatives from which form the framework of the Zoo's strategic plan. Each initiative has overlap with more than one of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals:

- Slow the threat of extinction.
- Reduce the effects of plastic on the environment.
- Ensure food availability for the future.
- Create respect and empathy for water conservation.
- Innovation: Be a pipeline to solutions.



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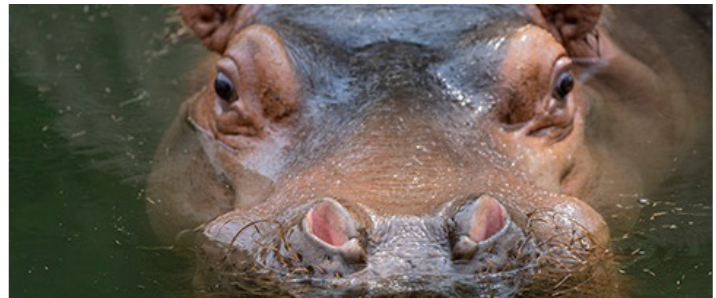
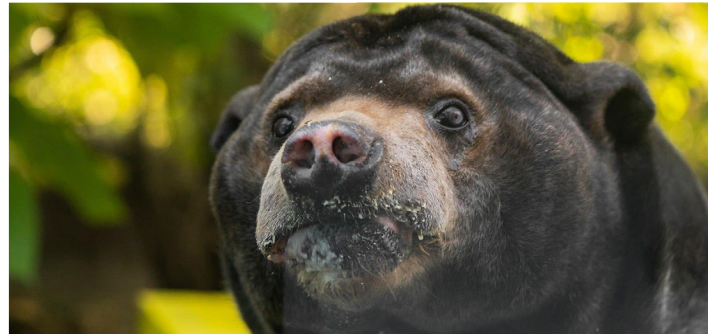
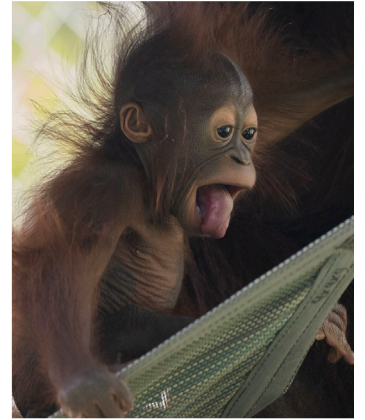
Phases

Reality Phase

During the third quarter of 2022, four leadership committees were established with the purpose of taking the first four Sustainability Initiatives and their aspirations and breaking them into manageable and realistic goals. Sustainability Initiative #5 – Innovation: Be a pipeline to solutions, was developed by the entire team.

Within each of the first four initiatives are four strategies dealing with the following four applications:

- **Strategy 1** – How does the initiative relate to our site and its programming?
- **Strategy 2** – How does the initiative relate to our community?
- **Strategy 3** – How does the initiative relate globally?
- **Strategy 4** – How does the initiative relate to our messaging and education efforts?
- **Strategy 5** – Details specific areas where innovation is desired.



Action Phase

The action phase of this plan commenced during the reality phase. Parallel to this plan is a living plan map that details related timelines, action steps, and budget requirements. The plan map lives on the staff online portal and will serve as the tool to measure progress.

Evaluation Phase

Not less than annually, the plan will be formally reviewed with progress reviews delivered to staff and board. The Board of Directors should consider plan progress in the annual review of the Chief Executive Officer.

A strategic plan essentially is a plan to plan. While the plan contains specific goals, objectives, timelines and evaluation processes, the planning should never stop. This plan is meant to be a living, ever-evolving plan that will change as the Zoo grows into the plan.

SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE

#1: Slow the Threat of Extinction

Guiding Principle: *We share a love and passion for all animals including animals under our care and animals in their range territories. If we don't act, we fear that we will lose more and more species. It is our obligation to be part of the solution to slow and stop the current rapid rate of extinction so that future generations can also benefit from wildlife.*



Strategy 1:

We use our facility and our audience to draw attention to the needs of wildlife so that we can influence behavior in a way that slows the threat of extinction.

Short-term Goals:

- **Goal 1:** We intend to continue making connections between our guests and living animals as a key way to create empathy. Through empathy we inspire change that benefits wildlife and wild places.
 - We will enhance our involvement with Species Survival Programs so that in the future there will be animals for zoos to continue to connect with people.
 - We will evaluate consortiums to be involved with to build sustainable populations of species that are not represented by a SSP.
 - We look for opportunities to add species that have active wild release programs to breed those species.
 - We look to increase the use of ambassador animals for the purpose of increasing empathy and awareness through education.
- **Goal 2:** Develop an inhouse training/education program so that our team of staff and volunteers are up to date on current trends, efforts and activities related to slowing extinction.

Long-term Initiative:

- Add staff position(s) dedicated to conservation.

Strategy 2:

As an organization that operates in a capital city, the Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center will become aware of and active in the political environment around us.

Short-term Goals:

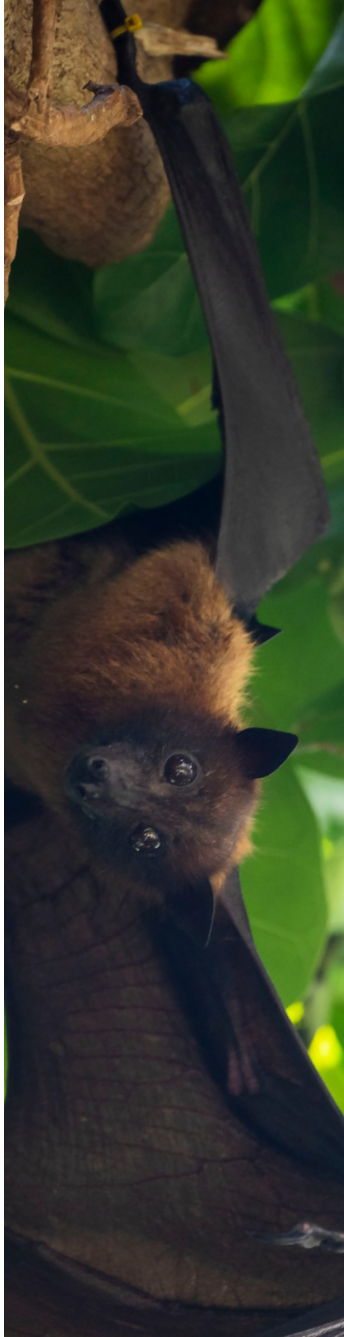
- **Goal 1:** Become louder and broader advocates for change that benefits wildlife and wild places.
- **Goal 2:** Advocate at the city, county, and state government levels for wildlife.
- **Goal 3:** Through a government perspective, be in the know of actions that may affect wildlife and wild places.

Long-term Initiative:

- Develop an agenda to support laws and ordinances that benefit wildlife and wild places.
- Be known as a state expert for all things related to wildlife.

SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE

#1: Slow the Threat of Extinction (Cont...)



Strategy 3:

Be active in making a difference in the preservation of wildlife in their range territories.

Short-term Goals:

- **Goal 1:** Enhance our presence in SAFE Programs that focus on saving species in their range territories.
- **Goal 2:** Increase financial support in range territories that has relevance to our community and our collection of animals. Give priority to programs that employ local people and display social responsibility through community-based conservation.
- **Goal 3:** Evaluate opportunities for habitat action and reforestation projects.
- **Goal 4:** Evaluate how increasing our relationship with the Zoo Conservation Outreach Group (ZCOG) can benefit our strategy.

Long-term Initiative:

- Identify what our long-term conservation strategies are going to be and what those investments look like.

Strategy 4:

Become a voice that inspires others to benefit wildlife and wild places.

Short-term Goals:

- **Goal 1:** Broaden the education related to the rate of extinction. Through that education, include our staff, our guests and our community members.
- **Goal 2:** As it relates to slowing the threat of extinction, be a better resource to educators. Engage them at a level that encourages them to inspire those in their circles of influence.
- **Goal 3:** Publicize the positive work that is occurring in or through our community; include our work and the work of other organizations.
- **Goal 4:** Develop a Sustainability Recognition Program.

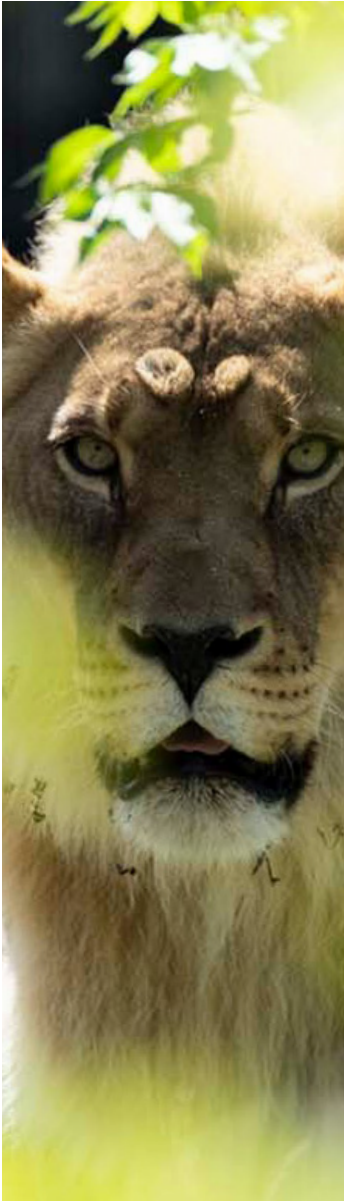
Long-term Initiative:

- Identify a way to measure whether Shawnee County is making a difference long term.
- Encourage Shawnee County to develop a Climate Action Plan.

SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE

#2: Reduce the Effects of Plastic on the Environment

Guiding Principle: Plastic affects the health of animals, ecosystems, and people. If we don't solve the plastics problem, ecosystems will suffer, and we risk losing more species. We will engage our community to aid in the solution.



Strategy 1:

The Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center will function in a way that minimizes the effects of plastics on the environment and will model this to the community.

Short-term Goals:

- **Goal 1:** The Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center will plan for a future that operates with minimal single use plastics.
- **Goal 2:** The Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center will be a role model for recycling and work with its community to build value and increase the desire of its guests to participate in recycling programs.
- **Goal 3:** Implement a plan/policy to purchase or select materials that are extracted using sustainable practices and contain non-hazardous chemicals and recycled content.

Long-term Initiative:

- Make purchases aligned with FSC, RSPO, and SDG global goals.

Strategy 2:

The Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center will be an active community leader in the effort of responsible use and reduction of plastics.

Short-term Goals:

- **Goal 1:** The Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center will work and collaborate with companies who share our goals.
- **Goal 2:** Raise awareness around recyclables through highlighting progressive business practices.
- **Goal 3:** Make a connection between successful recycling habits and the health of the Kansas River.

Long-term Initiative:

- Pursue legislation to support recycling efforts.

SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE

#2: Reduce the Effects of Plastic on the Environment (Cont...)



Strategy 3:

Through our efforts, support the need to improve global recycling efforts.

Short-term Goals:

- **Goal 1:** Identify a sister or partner marine-based organization to support ocean health.

Long-term Initiative:

- Support using alternatives to plastics.
- Support legislative changes that reduce plastics.

Strategy 4:

Become a valued resource and authority on the topic of recycling.

Short-term Goals:

- **Goal 1:** Develop stronger messaging promoting recycling.
- **Goal 2:** Continue to share messaging around regional connections to ocean health.
- **Goal 3:** Provide education internally and externally around plastics issues involving the environment.

Long-term Initiative:

- Work towards becoming single-use plastic free in the zoo's operations.



SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE

#3: Ensure Food Availability for the Future

Guiding Principle: *The presence of hunger prevents us from connecting with and delivering the Zoo's mission to a significant portion of our community. Hunger is going to have adverse impacts on the environment as more of the environment is altered for increased food production. Therefore, we must support solving the hunger issue now and for the future.*



Strategy 1:

The Topeka Zoo & Conservation Center uses its facilities to collect food, make food available to those in need and to provide education on relationships to food production.

Short-term Goals:

- **Goal 1:** Develop and implement a Farmers Market model to operate in one of the Zoo parking lots.
- **Goal 2:** Identify ways the Zoo can participate in food collection opportunities.
- **Goal 3:** The Zoo has well established pollinator gardens. Maximize their use to make connections with guests in meaningful ways.

Long-term Initiative:

- Develop a miniature community garden that can be used as a teaching tool to support engagement. Utilize the crops that are produced in both human and animal food programs.

Strategy 2:

The Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center supports partners, who are actively working throughout the community, solve hunger problems.

Short-term Goals:

- **Goal 1:** Form additional relationships with local organizations involved in the hunger cause.
- **Goal 2:** Develop and tell stories around community and pollinator gardens to promote awareness about current and future hunger-related issues.
- **Goal 3:** Support existing community driven initiatives by offering the use of our facilities as meeting/program spaces for other organizations to use regarding this initiative. Consider programs that might teach people how to cook from food they may get from a food bank or extension trainings from Kansas State University.

SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE

#3: Ensure Food Availability for the Future (Cont...)



Strategy 3:

The Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center has an influence on a global level through our conservation initiatives, we give preference and additional support to projects and programs that support and build equity within those areas. Through these efforts, the goal is to improve access to basic needs like food.

Short-term Goals:

- **Goal 1:** Continue to identify conservation projects to support that have equity components, similar to our tiger, giraffe and Asian elephant projects. These projects include components of employment and sustainable agriculture.
- **Goal 2:** Incorporate more fair-trade components into our retail and purchasing programs.
- **Goal 3:** Tell our success stories so that others can copy them through marketing initiatives, conference presentations, releases and publications.
- **Goal 4:** Explore opportunities to be more involved in habitat restoration and reforestation projects.

Strategy 4:

Through its messaging the Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center is a recognized resource for contributing to food availability and hunger issues.

Short-term Goals:

- **Goal 1:** Develop a marketing campaign around food availability and hunger issues.
- **Goal 2:** Build new audiences through weekend and evening programming. View this as a life-skills program.

Long-term Initiative:

- Develop a strategy for highlighting food waste and develop actions for reducing the amount of waste.

SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE

#4: Create Respect & Empathy for Water Conservation

Guiding Principle: Water is connected to everything. It impacts our health, our environment, and has social justice implications. It is our most valuable resource and it is vulnerable. If we don't mitigate issues now, we will face future restrictions.



Strategy 1: Onsite

Short-term Goals:

- **Goal 1:** Include more water related education with both internal training and in our onsite programs and interpretives.
- **Goal 2:** Study our water usage to understand what our water footprint is with the goal of using less water at our site.
- **Goal 3:** Manage the water that leaves our site in a way that it protects the Kansas River watershed.
- **Goal 4:** Interpret xeriscaping on our site for the purpose of encouraging the practice.

Long-term Initiative:

- Explore opportunities to use gray water and rainwater.

Strategy 2: Community

Short-term Goals:

- **Goal 1:** Become a better resource for community members regarding how to conserve water.
- **Goal 2:** Develop partnerships with like-minded organizations such as the Friends of the Kaw and Gage Park to be an active partner in protecting the Kansas River watershed.

Long-term Initiative:

- Lead the development of a community smart consumption policy as an example of community-based conservation.

Strategy 3: Global

Short-term Goals:

- **Goal 1:** Be a voice for the oceans.
- **Goal 2:** Form partnerships with aquariums, coastal zoos, or ocean-based non-profits.

Long-term Initiative:

- Support the establishment of Marine Protected Areas.

Strategy 4: Messaging

Short-term Goals:

- **Goal 1:** Promote smart consumption policies with our staff and the community.
- **Goal 2:** Promote water-wise gardening as defined by the American Public Gardens Association.
- **Goal 3:** Develop messaging around how water is commonly wasted.
- **Goal 4:** Promote awareness of our natural water system (Kansas River).

Long-term Initiative:

- Continue making our water education more robust.

SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE

#5: Be a Pipeline to Solutions

Guiding Principle: We believe that what we do changes the world. Through this, we inspire leading edge animal care, thought-provoking youth leadership programs, and we invite the local, regional, and global communities into our cause in a meaningful and contributable way.



Strategy 1:

The Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center will lead in redefining what qualifies as world class animal care in AZA accredited zoos.

Goals:

- **Goal 1:** The quality of existence of the animals living under human care will exceed that of their conspecifics.
- **Goal 2:** Animals living under human care will provide insight into how humans can provide a better existence for animals in their range territories.
- **Goal 3:** Animals living under human care generate empathy and respect in the humans that view them.
- **Goal 4:** The environment and experience through which animals under human care are viewed will engage people into action and into decision-making processes that positively impact wildlife and wild places.

Strategy 2:

Our youth are representative of future problem solvers. Problems will have to be solved faster utilizing solutions that haven't been invented yet. Our programs will prepare youth for this.

Goals:

- **Goal 1:** Expand and grow middle school and high school Eco-club programs.
- **Goal 2:** Include programming for youth with lower socioeconomic status.
- **Goal 3:** Implement a broad-reaching innovation leadership program for teens.

Strategy 3:

Through an understanding of probability theory and Bertrand's paradox, influence probability in the favor of wildlife and wild places.

Goals:

- **Goal 1:** Through the study of related trends, we know our industry's favorability. Shift favorability to increase the probability that zoos will continue to be desired resources in future decades.
- **Goal 2:** Through data analysis, we understand wild population trends of species. Work to decrease indifference for the purpose of saving species.