

# STRATEGIC PLAN

Topeka Zoo & Conservation Center

2023-2027

**topeka zoo**  
& conservation center





# CORE VALUES

Our core values are our highest priorities, deeply held beliefs, and our fundamental driving force. 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.

**Our Core Values include:**

## 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

## Introduction

Located in Shawnee County Kansas, the Topeka Zoo & Conservation Center is a cherished community destination. The zoo has a regional draw for its on-site attractions and its environmental education and citizen science programs.

Through the collaboration of staff driven goals, the zoo's mission and vision is acted upon through our work towards making a difference. Staff's efforts to work towards the zoo's sustainability goals, is seen through planning and design of the masterplan, programming, interpretation and excellent care providing quality of place for both animal and guest. The Topeka Zoo & Conservation Center continues to educate the local community about conservation and education influencing choices that have a global impact on the betterment of the planet.



## 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.

## Diversity, Inclusion, Accessibility, Equity 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.



# STRATEGIC PLAN

## Plan Concept

The Zoo's strategic plan is intended to provide guidance to its vision through common direction.



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.

The map to the vision of the Topeka Zoo & 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, inequities 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, 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 & Conservation Center has begun a journey of imagining 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 & Conservation Center. The Zoo's DEAI strategy is supported by a staff-driven plan.

### SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

The Topeka Zoo & 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.**





# STRATEGIC PLAN

## Phases

### Reality Phase

Within each of the sustainability initiatives, are four strategies outlining steps to identify and achieve our action plan:

- **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.

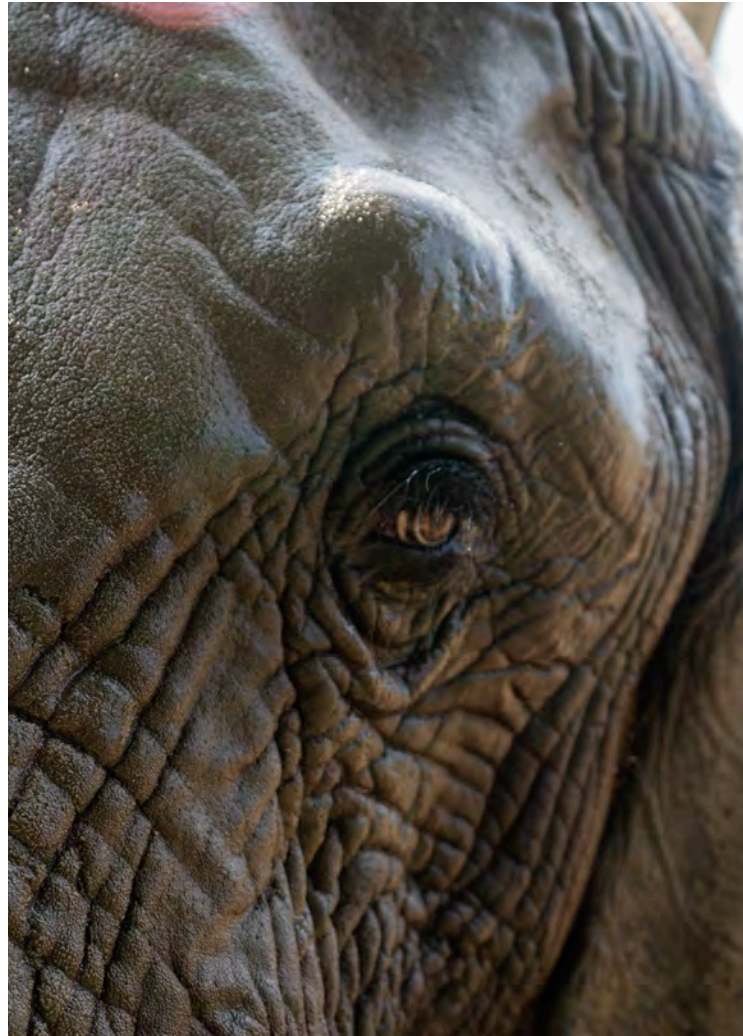
### Action Phase

The action phase of this plan commenced during the reality phase. Parallel to this our plan details related timelines, action steps, and budget requirements.

### Evaluation Phase

Not less than annually, the plan will be formally reviewed. The Board of Directors should consider plan progress in the annual review of the Chief Executive Officer.

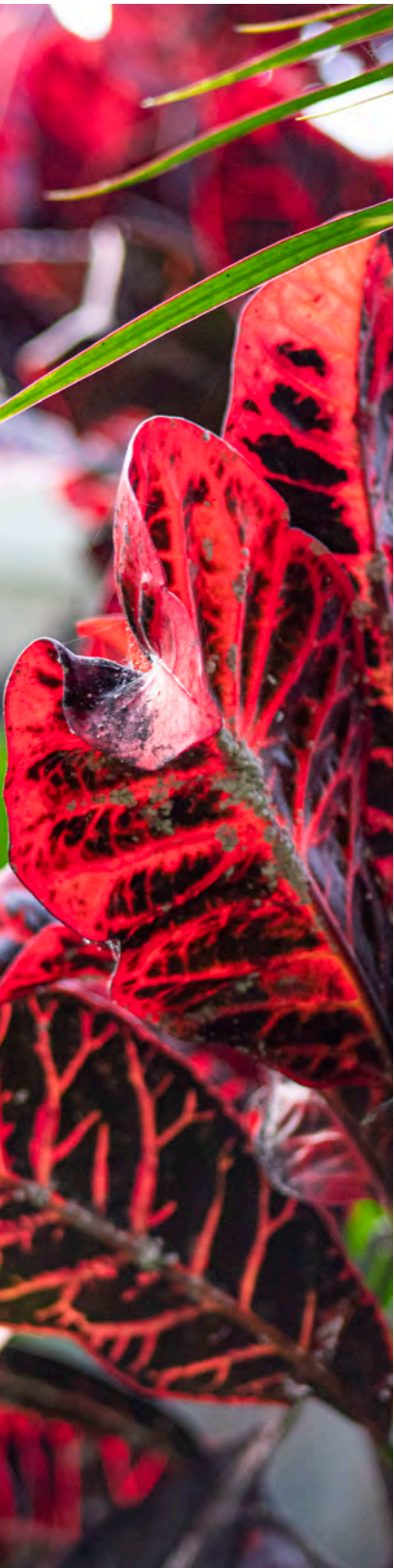
While the plan contains specific goals, objectives, timelines and evaluation processes, the planning should never stop. This plan is meant to be a living, ever-evolving plan that will change as the Zoo grows and continues to develop.



# 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 will enhance our involvement with Species Survival Programs (SSP) so that in the future there will be animals for zoos to continue to connect with people.
- **Goal 2** – We will evaluate consortium's to be involved with to build sustainable populations of species that are not represented by a SSP.
- **Goal 3** – We look for opportunities to add species that have active wild release programs to breed those species.
- **Goal 4** – Develop an in house 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.
- **Goal 5** – Conduct scheduled and impromptu Keeper Chats at animal viewing locations for guests to raise awareness and understanding of the zoo's animals.
- **Goal 6** – Present Docent Discovery Carts throughout the zoo on regular days and at special events year-round with strong conservation messaging.

#### Long-term Initiative:

- Add staff position(s) dedicated to conservation.

### Strategy 2:

**As an organization that operates in a capital city, the Topeka Zoo & 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** – 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 AZA, increasing our support with Safe Programs that focus on saving species in their range territories. Continue to and support other suitable programs such as Zoo Conservation Outreach Group (ZCOG), Giraffe Conservation Foundation (GCF), Asian Elephant Support (AES), and Tiger Conservation Campaign.
- **Goal 2** – Evaluate opportunities for ecosystem action and reforestation projects.

#### 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** – Develop a Sustainability Recognition Program.
  - Identify the right name.
  - Determine criteria.
  - Determine frequency of recognition – monthly or quarterly?
  - Would this benefit from being incentivized?
  - Would these partners display a zoo/wildlife friendly decal at their place of business?

#### Long-term Initiative:

- Identify a way to measure whether Shawnee County is making a difference in the 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 & 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 & Conservation Center will plan for a future that operates with minimal single use plastics.
  - We will work towards becoming plastic free in our food and beverage establishment.
  - We will work towards eliminating plastic in our retail functions.
  - We will work towards eliminating the purchase of single use plastics across the zoo.
- **Goal 2** – The Topeka Zoo & 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.
  - Evaluate what the possibilities for recycling are beyond current services.
    - Terracycle for latex gloves
    - Glass
    - E-waste
    - Metal
    - Cordage
- **Goal 3** – Implement a plan outlining the procedures to purchase materials, that are environmentally friendly. Select materials that are extracted by using sustainable practices. That contain non-hazardous chemicals and recycled content. Establish policy for purchasers to follow in line with our strategic plan.

#### Long-term Initiative:

- Make purchases that align with Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and United Nation's global goals.

### Strategy 2:

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

#### Short-term Goals:

- **On the environment (continued)**
- **Goal 1** – The Topeka Zoo & Conservation Center will work and collaborate with organizations who share our goals and raise awareness around recyclables through highlighting progressive business practices.
- **Goal 2** – Make a connection between successful recycling habits and the health of the Kansas River and its watershed.

#### Long-term Initiative:

- Pursue legislation to support recycling efforts.



# SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE

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

### Strategy 3:

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

#### Short-term Goals:

- **Goal 1** – Develop stronger messaging promoting recycling.
  - Develop a plastic use guide for the public to use as a tool.
  - Education programming on regarding the recycle recycling triangle symbol with number markers indicating if its recyclable – 1, 2, and 5 for Shawnee Co.
  - Support using alternatives to plastics.

#### Long-term Initiative:

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

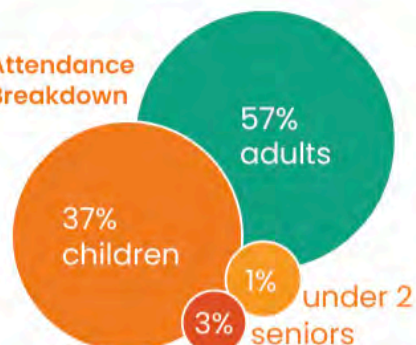
#### Long-term Initiative:

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

## WHO WE REACHED IN 2023

Total Visitor Attendance **255,757**

Attendance Breakdown



VOTED #1 FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT IN TOPEKA; BEST OF TOPEKA



Ticketed Attendance (Non-Members)

- Shawnee County
- Non-Shawnee County

Topeka Zoo Memberships **5,193**



# 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 or elsewhere.
  - Begin exploring in 2023 for a 2025 Launch
  - Talk to library about what they have learned through their experience
  - Explore regulations, codes and liabilities
  - Consider not charging a vendor fee so that food can be priced more reasonably, making fresh produce more accessible to more people at a lower cost and more accessible for local vendors
- **Goal 2** – Identify ways the zoo can participate in food collection opportunities.
  - Begin exploring in 2023 for a 2024 Launch.
  - Consider at least one external organization to partner with, using the zoo as a food collection resource.
  - Harvester's, Let's Help, Doorstep, Rescue Mission, Salvation Army, Boys & Girls Clubs or the local Synagogue, or another food pantry program.
  - A food drive with Harvester drive or other food distribution

#### 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 & 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.
  - Meet with local groups also engaged in this cause to seek synergies.
  - Kroger – Zero Hunger
- **Goal 2** – Raise awareness about the relationship between pollinators and the production of food for human consumption.
  - Consider the following:
    - Pollinator Gardens – highlight schools and businesses that are implementing pollinator gardens at their sites.

# SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE

## #3: Ensure Food Availability for the Future

(Continued)



- **Goal 3** – Support existing community driven initiatives by offering the use of our facilities as a meeting or program spaces for other organizations to use regarding this initiative.

### Strategy 3:

The Topeka Zoo & 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 with equity components, like 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 in 2024.
- **Goal 3** – Be a leader, telling our success stories showing others to direction to lead, follow, or collaborate. Through marketing initiatives, conference presentations, releases, and publications.

### Strategy 4:

Through its messaging the Topeka Zoo & 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.
  - Tell other success stories.
  - Include how environmental issues affect hunger issues.
- **Goal 2** – Build new audiences through weekend and evening programming. View this as a life skills program. Consider programs that teach people how to cook with food they would obtain from a food bank.

#### 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: On-site Goals

#### Short-term Goals:

- **Goal 1** – Include more water related education with both internal training, and external education programs, including interpretive graphics and other elements.
- **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 water that leaves our site in a way that protects the Kansas River and its watershed.
  - Sequence:
    - Mark drains that go to river and ensure inappropriate materials are not utilizing those drains.
    - Ensure chemicals that we use are adequately disposed of.
- **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 Goals

#### Short-term Goals:

- **Goal 1** – Become a better resource for community members regarding how to conserve water.
  - Sequence:
    - Develop a plan to provide education regarding drought tolerant yards.
    - Train staff on water conservation, empowering them to be experts.
- **Goal 2** – Develop partnerships with organizations to protect the Kansas River Watershed. Such as Friends of the Kaw, working together to protect the Kansas River watershed, and promote awareness of the KAW.

#### Long-term Initiative:

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

### Strategy 3: Global Goals

#### Short-term Goals:

- **Goal 1** – Be a voice for the oceans.
- **Goal 2** – Form partnerships with aquariums, coastal zoos, or ocean-based nonprofits to support on-site ocean conservation.

#### 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.

#### 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 contributive way.

### Strategy 1:

The Topeka Zoo & 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.





# SUSTAINABILITY POLICY INTEGRATIONS

Through the strategic planning process and a commitment to sustainability, discussion occurred regarding topics that may require an organizational position or policy to ensure a shift in culture. The following topics will be reviewed with the goal of determining the best path forward.

- Procurement policy and procedures
- Certified Sustainable Palm Oil
- Single Use Plastics usage in daily operations
- Staff Plastics Policy
- Develop recruitment and on-boarding materials regarding our sustainability position.
- Green Infrastructure



## **Mission Statement**

To enrich the community through wildlife conservation and education.

**topeka zoo**  
& conservation center

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**[www.topekazoo.org](http://www.topekazoo.org)**