



## Topeka Zoo; Service Dog Policy and procedure

Revised 07/15/2025

### Preface

*The purposes of policies are to provide staff with direction and guidance on procedures as related to the operation of the Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center. The adopted policy is expected to be followed at all times. If exceptions to the policy occur, the supervisor should approve the exception, before implementing the change. This policy will remain in force until rescinded or revised by the Director.*

**Policy Statement:** The Topeka Zoo & Conservation Center is committed to providing a safe, inclusive, and accessible experience for all guests. We welcome guests with service animals as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), while prioritizing the health and welfare of the rare and endangered species in our care.

### **What Qualifies as a Service Animal?**

According to the ADA:

- A **service animal** is a dog that is individually trained to perform tasks directly related to a person's disability.
- **Emotional support animals, comfort animals, therapy dogs, and pets are not considered service animals** under the ADA and are not permitted in the Zoo.

Staff may only ask the following two questions:

1. Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability?
2. What task or work has the dog been trained to perform?

### **Additional Classifications Recognized by Kansas Law**

In addition to ADA-recognized service animals, Kansas law also acknowledges two other classifications:

1. **Service Dogs in Training**
2. **Professional Therapy Dogs**

**Service Dogs in Training :** A service dog in training is a dog that is actively being trained to perform specific tasks to assist an individual with a disability. While still in training, the dog must be under the control of a qualified trainer and is subject to the same rules as a fully trained service animal.

### **Requirements for Entry:**

- Must be accompanied by a qualified trainer.
- Trainer must present an identification card or letter containing:

- Trainer's name.
- Name, address, and phone number of the training center.
- Types of tasks the dog is being trained to perform.
- A picture of the trainer.

**Professional Therapy Dogs :**A professional therapy dog is trained to provide specific physical or therapeutic support and works under the supervision of a qualified handler as part of a professional care team. These dogs do not qualify as ADA service animals but may be permitted when performing duties as part of a recognized therapy program.

#### **Requirements for Entry:**

- Must be working as part of a professional care team under the control of a handler.
- Handler must present an identification card or letter containing:
  - Handler's name.
  - Name, address, and phone number of the training center or therapy organization.
  - Types of functions the dog is trained to perform.
  - A picture of the handler.

### **Service Animal Behavior and Control Requirements**

To ensure the safety, welfare, and enjoyment of all guests, staff, and animals, service animals must meet the following behavioral and supervision standards while on Zoo grounds.

#### **Control and Supervision**

- Service animals must be harnessed, leashed, or tethered unless these devices interfere with their work or the handler's disability prevents their use.
- In such cases, the animal must be under voice, signal, or other effective control at all times.
- The handler is solely responsible for the care, behavior, and supervision of the service animal while on Zoo property.
- The Zoo is not required to provide food, care, or a designated relief area for service animals.

#### **Exclusion and Removal Criteria**

Service animals may be excluded from Zoo property or specific areas if they:

- Exhibit vicious or aggressive behavior toward people or animals.
- Are out of control, and the handler does not take effective action to control the dog.
- Are not housebroken.
- Pose a direct threat to the health or safety of others, including Zoo animals.

If a service animal must be removed for any reason, the individual with the disability will be given the option to continue their visit without the animal.

#### **Restricted Areas for Animal Welfare**

The Zoo has a duty to protect its collection of rare, endangered, and sensitive animal species. Some areas are restricted due to the potential for:

- Stress or agitation caused by the presence of dogs (predator species).
- Safety concerns related to nesting, breeding, or the introduction of new animals.
- The risk of injury to Zoo animals or service animals.

Staff may monitor service animals during visits and may intervene if Zoo animals show signs of distress.

The Zoo reserves the right to:

- Restrict service animal access to certain exhibits, experiences, or behind-the-scenes areas.
- Designate areas as off-limits or sensitive, depending on animal behavior or medical status.
- Request that guests move away from exhibits where Zoo animals are visibly agitated or disturbed by the presence of a service dog.

### **Examples of Animal Distress or Risk**

Guests must be alert to signs that their service animal is causing distress to the Zoo's animals. Guests are expected to move away from exhibits immediately if signs of agitation are observed.

Signs include:

- Barking, howling, or growling from Zoo animals.
- Repetitive pacing or running in enclosures.
- Bumping into glass or barriers.
- Erratic or unusual behavior.

### **Restricted and Sensitive Areas**

To protect the well-being of both Zoo animals and service animals, certain areas within the Topeka Zoo & Conservation Center are designated as restricted or sensitive. These designations help prevent animal stress, reduce risk of illness or injury, and ensure compliance with USDA Animal Welfare regulations.

#### **Off-Limits Areas (No Service Animal Entry):**

- **Giraffe Feeding Platforms**
- **Elephant Barn**
- **Lorikeet Aviary and Feeding Area**
- **Rainforest Exhibit – No entry permitted due** to close interaction with free-roaming animals.
- **Farmyard Contact Areas – No entry permitted due** to close interaction with free-roaming animals.

#### **Restricted with Limitations:**

- **Indoor Giraffe Viewing Area** – Entry permitted, but service animals must **remain at a safe distance**.
- **Camp Cowabunga indoor viewing glass (lion, patas monkey, cheetah, porcupine)-** Entry permitted, but service animals must **remain at a safe distance**.

Guests with service animals may be monitored by staff in these areas to support safety and reduce disturbance to exhibits.

### **Animal Welfare Monitoring**

The Zoo's priority is the safety and comfort of its animals. Staff may observe and monitor service animals for:

**Signs of Aggression or Illness:**

- Uncontrolled or aggressive behavior.
- Nasal discharge.
- Vomiting.
- Excessive scratching or itching.
- Scabs or open wounds.
- Ticks, lice, or visible parasites.

If a service animal displays any of the above signs, staff may take appropriate steps, including requesting removal from specific areas.

**Signs of Distress in Zoo Animals:**

Guests **must move** away from exhibits immediately if Zoo animals exhibit signs of agitation caused by the presence of a service animal, including:

- Unusual vocalizations (e.g., howling, barking).
- Erratic pacing or rapid movement.
- Bumping into walls, glass, or barriers.
- Aggressive or retreating behavior.

Staff are authorized to intervene if service animal presence negatively impacts animal welfare.

**Responsibilities and Limitations**

- The Zoo is not responsible for the supervision, feeding, or care of service animals at any time.
- Service animals must never enter enclosures or make physical contact with Zoo animals.
- Guests may choose to leave a service animal with another member of their party while visiting restricted areas.