REIMAGINE. RENEW. RECONNECT.

MASTER PLAN 2025-2030

topeka zoo
& conservation center

Dear Friends of the Topeka Zoo & Conservation Center,

It's an exciting time to be part of the Topeka Zoo family. For almost a century, our zoo has been a place of wonder — where families have made memories, where generations have connected with wildlife, and where conservation has come to life. Today, as we look to the future, we invite you to join us on a journey to **Reimagine, Renew, and Reconnect** with everything that makes the Topeka Zoo so special.

Our new **Five-Year Master Plan** is more than a blueprint for growth — it's a bold vision to elevate our entire campus while honoring the heart and history of this beloved community treasure. Together, we will celebrate our identity, tell our story in new and powerful ways, and build upon the legacy that has shaped us. Think nostalgia with something new: experiences that feel familiar yet fresh, comforting yet exciting — and full of reasons to return again and again.

Every year, you'll see something new come to life — new habitats, guest amenities, and opportunities to get closer than ever to the animals and conservation stories you love. This reimagining of our spaces will allow us to **maximize our campus for animal experiences and habitats**, enhance functionality of our operations, and create a more engaging and comfortable educational experience for our guests, all while remaining financially responsible and sustainable.

But this plan isn't just about what's inside our gates. It's about the connection we share with our community. We are committed to deepening our partnerships with local nonprofits, schools, and organizations, elevating one another's work and strengthening the bonds that make Topeka thrive. Together, we'll ensure that the Topeka Zoo is not only a year-round destination — but also a source of community pride and celebration.

As we embark on this next chapter, we invite you to dream with us, to invest in our shared vision, and to rediscover the wonder that began here so many years ago. The future of the Topeka Zoo is bright, and with your support, we will Reimagine, Renew, and Reconnect — creating a zoo that inspires, educates, and unites us all.

With gratitude and excitement,

Christina Castellano

Christina Castellano, PhD, MBA
CEO
Topeka Zoo & Conservation Center

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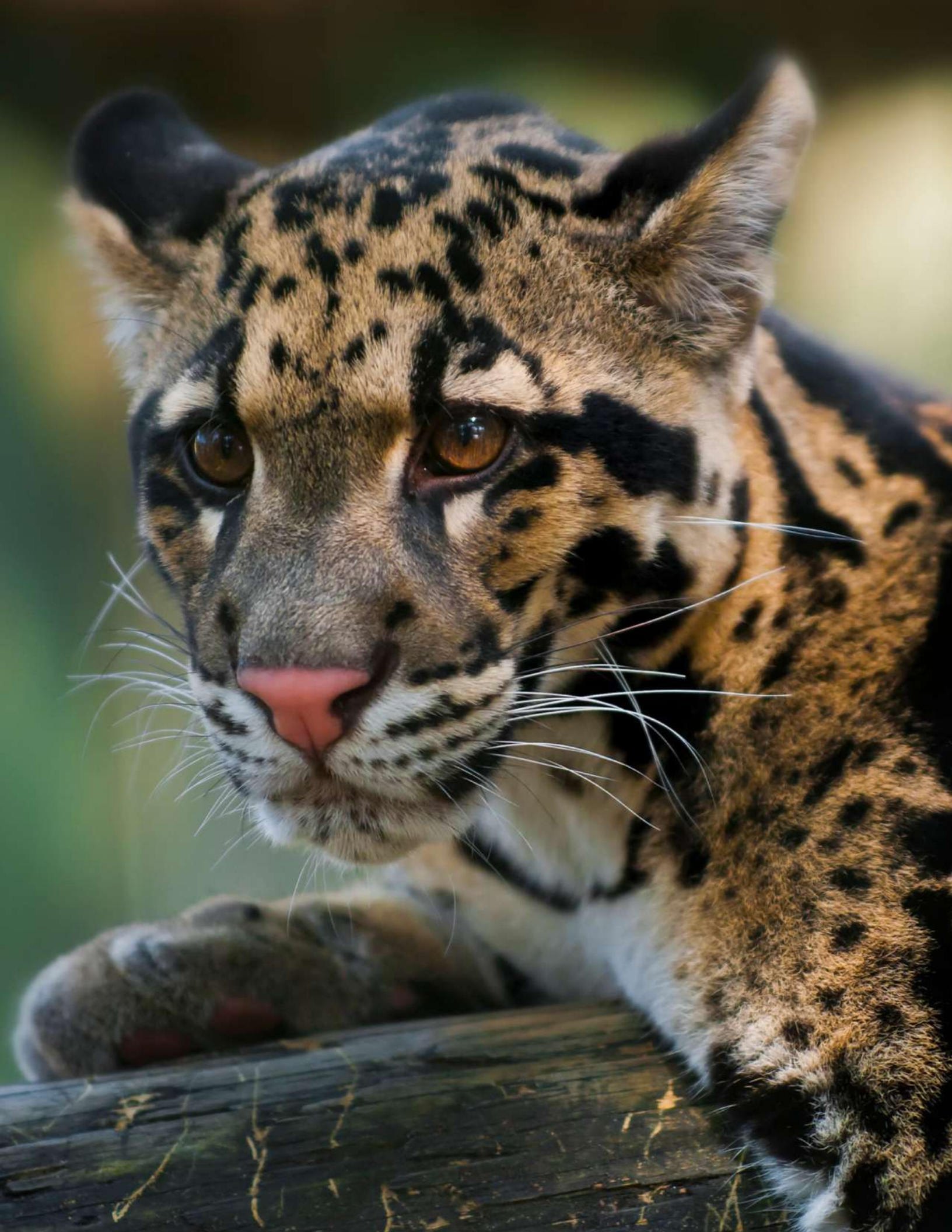


MARK AND BETTE MORRIS FAMILY TIGER TRAILS AND DEN ACADEMY

Tiger Trails and Den Academy is where legacy inspires discovery, and discovery shapes the future.

At Tiger Trails and Den Academy, we celebrate the pioneering spirit of Mark and Bette Morris — Topeka's own trailblazers whose groundbreaking work in animal nutrition forever changed the world of animal wellbeing. Their legacy reminds us that big things happen in Topeka, and that when passion and purpose come together, anything is possible.

Rooted in that same spirit of innovation, Tiger Trails and Den Academy is where the next generation of dreamers, scientists, and conservationists will take their first steps. Through immersive encounters, transparent animal care, and hands-on scientific exploration, guests will see firsthand how expert nutrition, enrichment, and compassion come together to make Topeka's tiger program world-renowned.

At the heart of the experience, our one-of-a-kind observation building and interactive education center will invite children and families to step into the role of animal scientists — learning how diets are formulated, how wellbeing programs are designed, and how each detail contributes to the survival of endangered species. Young learners will explore

real-world research and discover how their own curiosity can drive global change.

To expand this powerful story of nutrition and interconnectedness, Tiger Trails proudly introduces a new species to the Topeka Zoo — the King Vulture. As nature's consummate recycler, the King Vulture represents the essential conclusion to the tiger's story — a symbol of renewal and balance in the wild. Together, the tiger and vulture illustrate the full circle of life: from apex predator to scavenger, from feast to foundation. Through this lens, guests will gain a deeper appreciation for how every species plays a vital role in sustaining ecosystem health, both in nature and in managed care.

Through these experiences, Tiger Trails and Den Academy will foster empathy for tigers, deepen understanding of conservation challenges such as poaching, and empower guests to be part of the solution. From watching cubs grow in a nurturing nursery environment to seeing innovation in action through animal healthcare and breeding programs, every moment tells a story of care, collaboration, and hope.

Here, we honor our past, embrace the present, and build a future where every visitor — especially every child — leaves knowing that greatness begins with curiosity, compassion, and the courage to make a difference.

— Coming 2026

SECURITY BENEFIT CHILDREN'S ZOO AND A NEW PLAY ZONE

The Security Benefit Children's Zoo and a new Play Zone is where every visit is a celebration of joyous play and the spirit of Kansas.

At the Security Benefit Children's Zoo and a new Play Zone, **childhood wonder** comes alive through the sights, sounds, and **spirit of the farm.** Inspired by the timeless charm of the iconic Fisher-Price barn, this reimagined experience blends nostalgia with fresh excitement — a place where families laugh, learn, and play together in a world alive with oinks, bleats, baas, hee-haws, and clucks.

Children can explore lively farm scenes, meet friendly goats, alpacas, pigs, chickens, and donkeys, and engage all their senses in a setting designed for discovery. At its heart stands an antique tractor, a proud **tribute to the roots of all Kansans** — a reminder that ours is an agricultural state that feeds the world and that hard work, care, and connection to the land are part of our shared story.

Alongside the barn is the farm-inspired play area that offers **endless opportunities for joy** — climbing, sliding, jumping, and imagining — while comfortable guest amenities provide shaded seating, gathering spaces, and conveniences that invite families to stay, relax, and enjoy hours of fun together.

Together, these vibrant new spaces **celebrate connection:** between families, between children and animals, and between community and nature. It's a place where the laughter of today's children honors the roots of our past and plants the seeds of care, curiosity, and compassion for the future.

— Coming 2027

DISCOVERY FOREST

Discovery Forest is where every branch tells a story, and every visit deepens our connection to life.

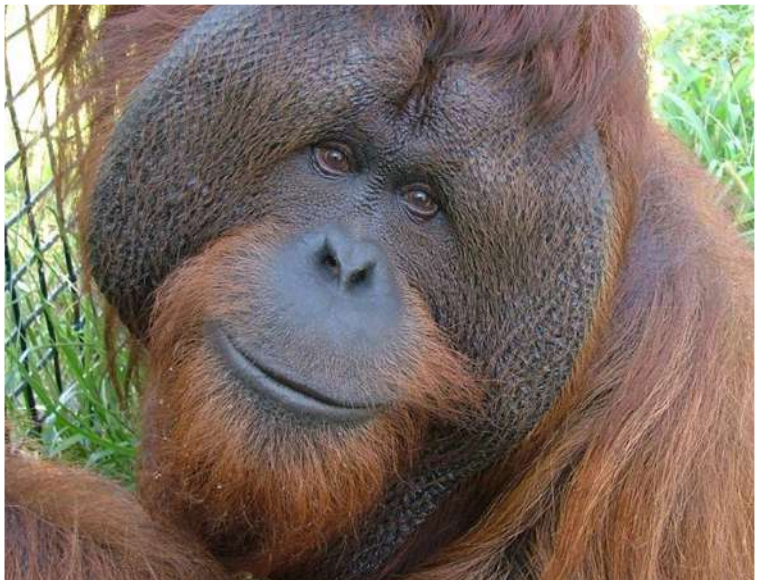
The Lianas Forest at the Topeka Zoo is being reimagined as 'Discovery Forest", a renewed celebration of the incredible diversity of life found in forests around the world — from the tropical rainforests of Borneo to the misty mountain forests of the Himalayas. This renovation honors what guests already love while introducing exciting new experiences, vibrant habitats, and opportunities to connect with nature in powerful new ways.

At the heart of Discovery Forest lives the beloved orangutan family that generations of guests have come to know and love — each with a unique personality, history, and charm. Their enhanced indoor and outdoor habitats encourage natural behaviors through sway poles, climbing structures, enrichment zones, and training areas designed to promote movement, learning, and wellbeing.

An outdoor parallel play zone beside the orangutan habitat invites children to climb, swing, and explore just like the orangutans they're observing — creating shared moments of wonder and empathy through play.

The forest story grows even richer with the arrival of two new species joining the Topeka Zoo for the very first time:

- **Clouded leopards,** the mysterious and agile "ghosts of the forest," whose extraordinary climbing abilities and striking markings reveal the hidden beauty and stealth of rainforest canopies.
- **Red pandas,** charismatic climbers from the cool, misty forests of the Himalayas, bringing warmth, charm, and an opportunity to explore the diversity of forest ecosystems across the globe.

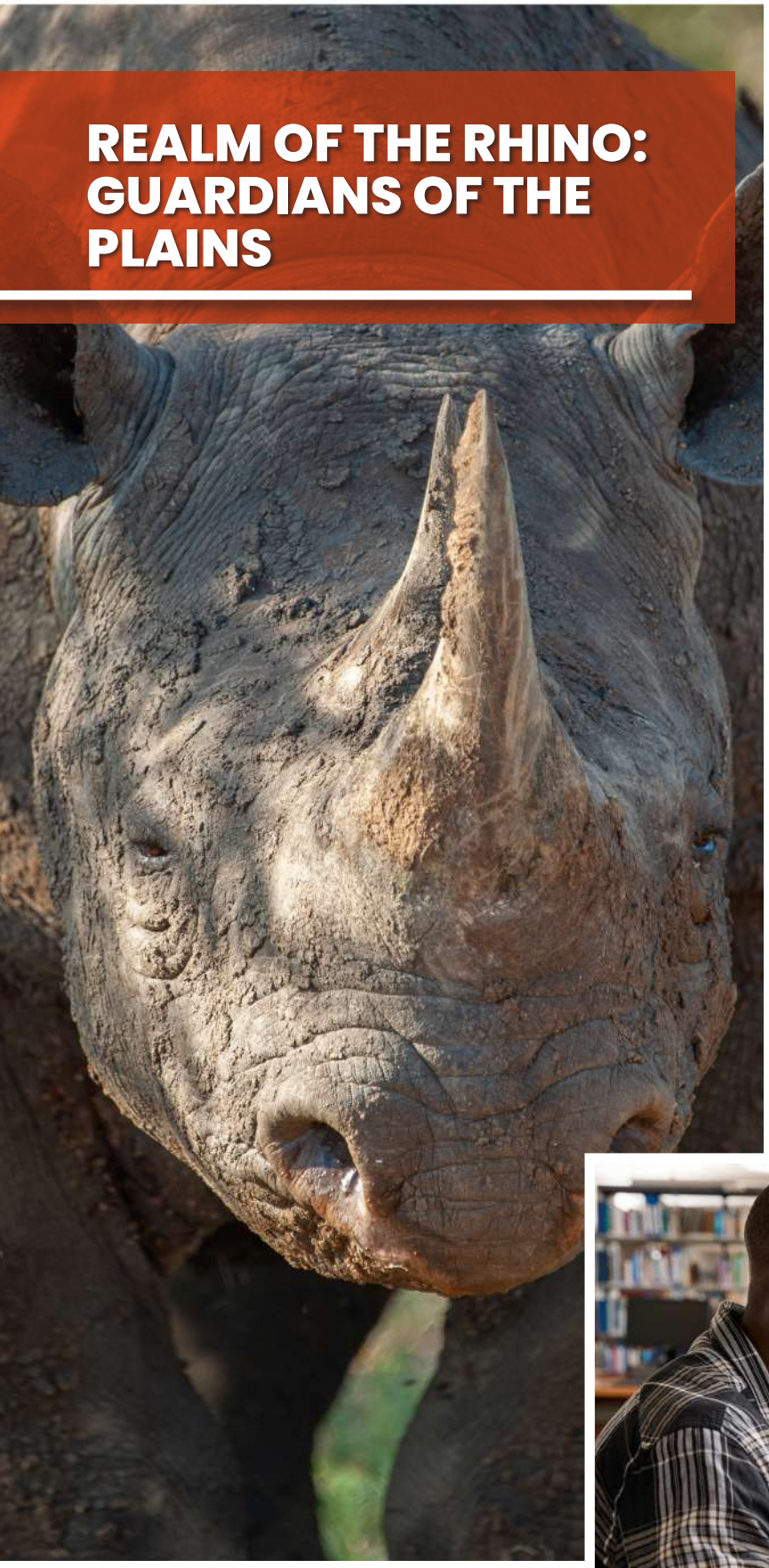


Guests can enjoy **year-round connections** through thoughtfully designed indoor and outdoor viewing areas, keeping them close to the action no matter the season. At the center of the indoor experience, the **Green Gallery** immerses visitors in a world of botanical wonders, featuring rare orchids, towering tropical plants, and fascinating carnivorous species — a paradise for plant lovers and a reminder of the complexity and resilience of forests everywhere.

Discovery Forest is a place of **renewal and reconnection** — where we celebrate the diversity of life, nurture curiosity, and honor the incredible stories of animals and plants from forests near and far.

— Coming 2028

REALM OF THE RHINO: GUARDIANS OF THE PLAINS

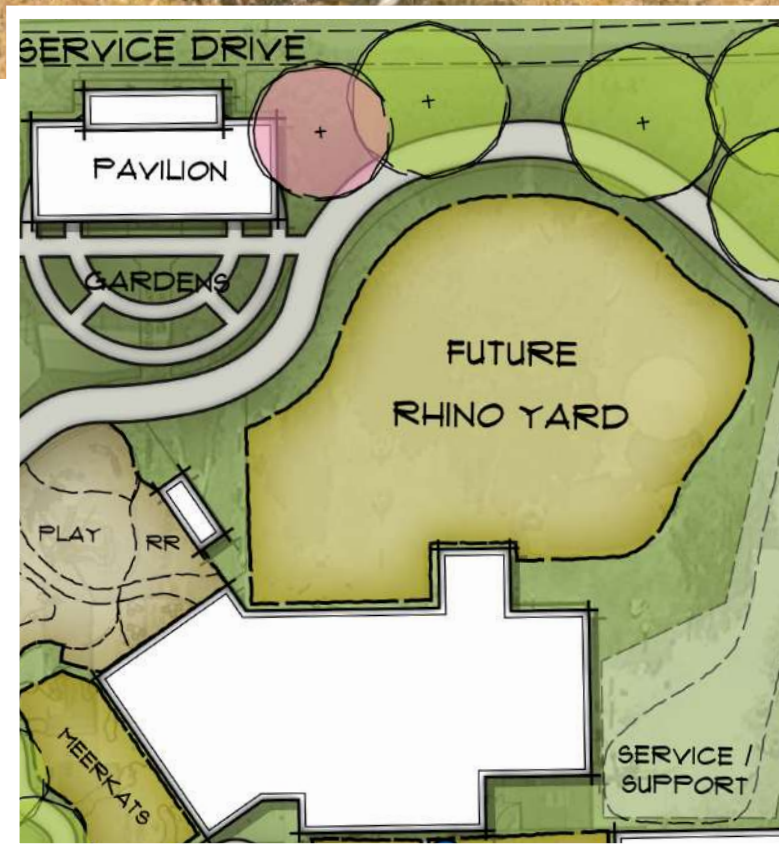


Realm of the Rhino: Guardians of the Plains is where strength meets survival, and every guest becomes a guardian.

Realm of the Rhino: Guardians of the Plains is a bold new experience that immerses guests in the powerful world of one of Earth's most awe-inspiring and imperiled creatures — the rhino. These magnificent giants, symbols of strength and resilience, now stand at the brink of extinction. Their story is one of both tragedy and hope, and here at the Topeka Zoo, guests will become part of the fight to protect them.

Through **interactive encounters and up-close viewing** — both outdoors and year-round in a specially designed **indoor dayroom** — visitors will experience the raw presence of rhinos like never before. Every snort, stomp, and rumble connects us to their struggle and reminds us of our responsibility to ensure their survival.

At the heart of this experience lies a **technology hub,** a dynamic learning space that mirrors the pulse of real-world conservation. Designed like an **anti-**



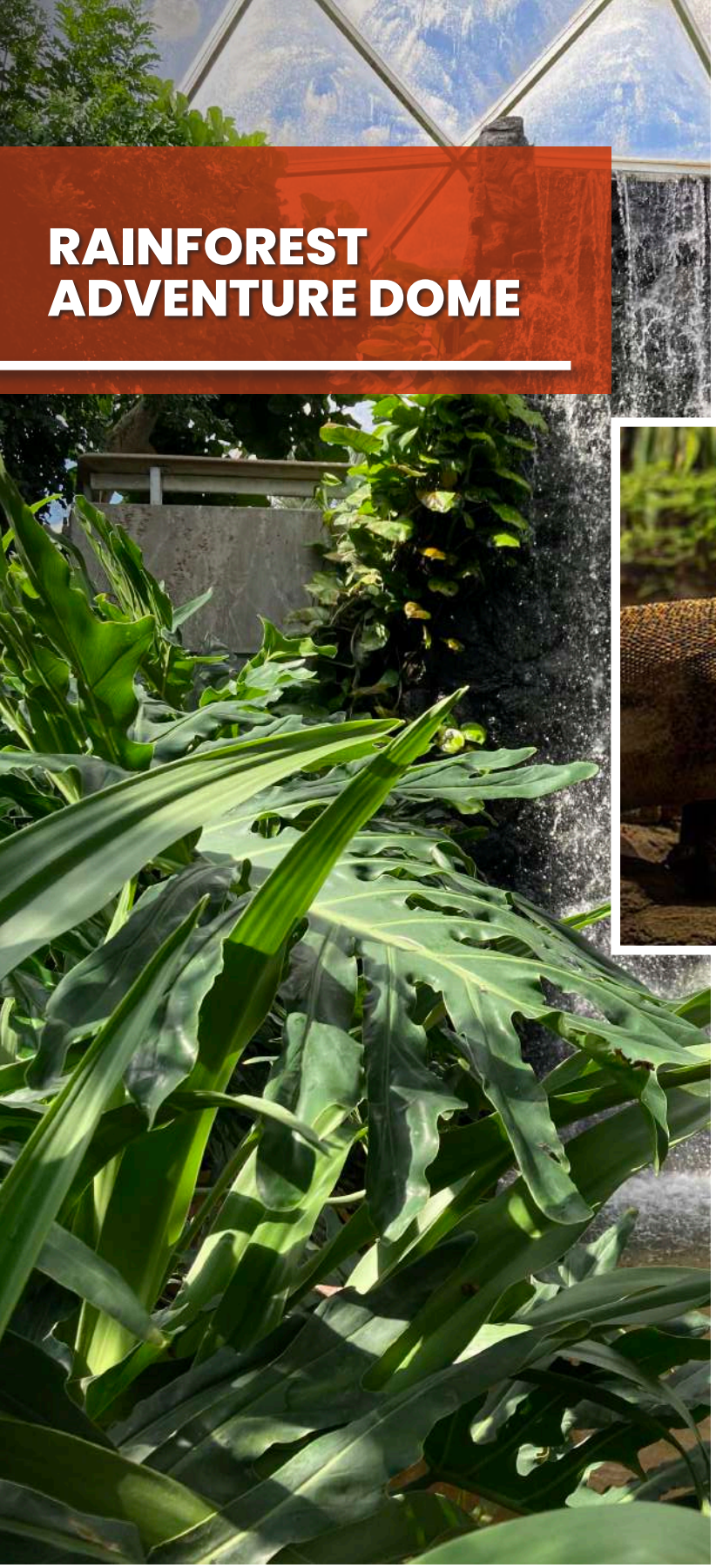
poaching ranger station, this immersive environment will feature **live footage, soundscapes, and displays** of rhinos in the wild and the courageous guardians who risk everything to protect them. Here, guests will explore how science and technology — from **AI-driven monitoring** to **assisted reproduction techniques** — are revolutionizing the future of wildlife protection. It's an engaging, hands-on space that empowers **young adults and adults alike** to see how innovation and action go hand in hand.

Adding a fascinating new layer, the building will also house the **Bug Zoo turned Insectarium,** connecting the largest of the land's heavyweights to some of the planet's smallest and most threatened creatures. From beetles to butterflies, this space celebrates the **diversity of life — from little to big, and everything in between** — reminding us that every species, no matter its size, plays a vital role in the balance of nature.

Realm of the Rhino: Guardians of the Plains is more than an exhibit — it's a movement. A call to action. A space that stirs the heart, sharpens the mind, and empowers every visitor to take part in the story of conservation, science, and hope.

— Coming 2029

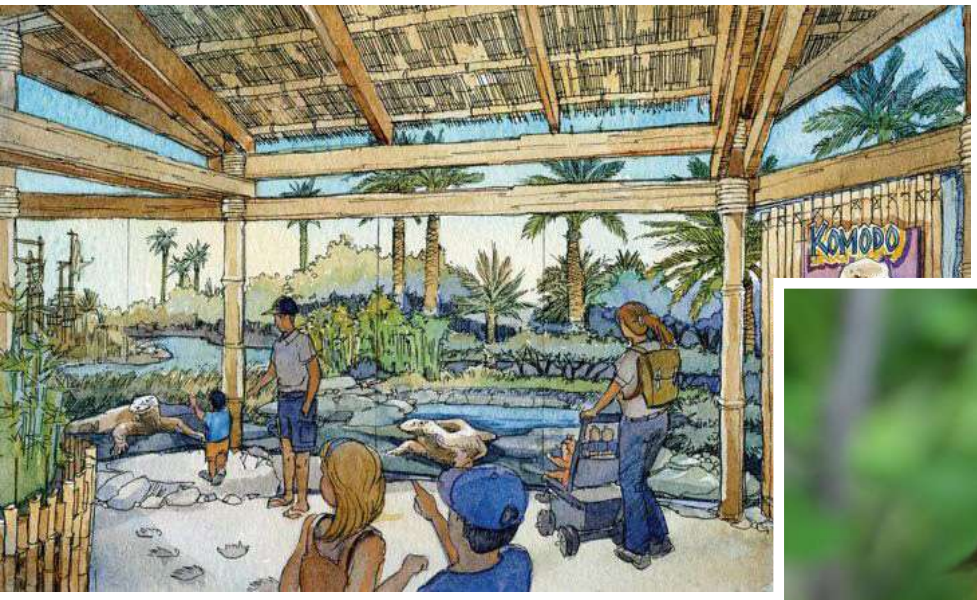
RAINFOREST ADVENTURE DOME



The Rainforest Adventure Dome is where curiosity roams free and wildlife comes alive.

Celebrating 50 years of wonder, the **Rainforest Dome** at the Topeka Zoo has inspired generations of guests since it first opened in 1974 as the nation's first rainforest dome in a zoo. Now, we are reimagining this iconic space as a vibrant, immersive experience that honors its rich history while inviting guests to see, explore, and connect with tropical wildlife like never before.

The renovated Rainforest Dome will showcase a rich tapestry of life — from **Komodo dragons** in expansive indoor-outdoor habitats that highlight their power and majesty, to **dazzling dart frogs** illuminating the forest floor with brilliant color. **Sloths, golden lion tamarins, and tropical birds** bring motion, charm, and curiosity to every corner, emphasizing the intricate connections within rainforest ecosystems.



Thoughtfully redesigned indoor and outdoor spaces will **increase accessibility and visibility,** allowing guests of all ages to get closer to the animals while maintaining safe and respectful viewing. Elevated platforms, open sightlines, and immersive habitat design create a 360-degree rainforest experience, making every visit engaging, educational, and unforgettable.

The Rainforest Dome is a place of **reimagination and reconnection** — where guests can witness tropical biodiversity up close, understand the urgent conservation challenges these species face, and be inspired to protect the ecosystems they call home. This renovation ensures that the Rainforest Dome's legacy of awe, learning, and wonder continues for generations to come.

— Coming 2030

WHO WE ARE

Mission Statement

To enrich our community through wildlife conservation and education.

Vision Statement

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

STRATEGIC PLAN

Through a process that included paid and volunteer staff, board members and community stakeholders, the Topeka Zoo & Conservation Center identified the following five Sustainability Initiatives, which form the framework of the zoo's strategic plan. Each initiative overlaps with one or more 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.

ACCREDITATION

In 1971, the Foundation for Zoos and Aquariums was established, with Gary K. Clarke as President of the Board of Directors. Today, it is known as the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. Under Clarke's leadership, the organization developed a comprehensive vision to address all aspects of zoo operations, including safety, accreditation, customer service, finance, facilities, and governance.

SAFE™ SAVING ANIMALS FROM EXTINCTION

ACCREDITED BY THE ASSOCIATION OF ZOOS & AQUARIUMS

WAZA World Association of Zoos and Aquariums Institution Member

GOVERNANCE

On April 3, 2021, the City of Topeka and Friends of the Topeka Zoo joined in a Public Private Partnership, transitioning full responsibility for the operations and funding model for the Topeka Zoo & Conservation Center to Friends of the Topeka Zoo. This allowed the zoo to move forward as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. The Topeka Zoo & Conservation Center is now a true performance and mission-based organization, free from limitations associated with a municipal form of governance.

GAGE PARK IMPROVEMENT

During the November 2022 ballot, residents of Shawnee County voted to implement a 0.2% sales tax to support the three entities located within Gage Park, including the Topeka Zoo & Conservation Center. This tax generates annual revenue to sustain the operational budget of the zoo.

LEADERSHIP AND BOARD MEMBERS

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Vince Frye
Kris Klima
Bette Morris
Colton Strathman
Matt Strathman
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Widge Yager
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Dina Cox, Executive Committee

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SUPPORT THE FUTURE OF THE TOPEKA ZOO

Scan the QR code to learn how you can make a difference.

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635 SW Gage Blvd., Topeka, KS 66606

To enrich our community through
wildlife conservation and education.