



40+ YEARS OF SAVING  
AND PROTECTING SPECIES  
AT HOME AND ABROAD



**toronto**  
**ZOO**

**STRATEGIC PLAN**  
**2015-2020**





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# 1. BUILDING ON OUR SUCCESS

The world's populations of fish, birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles fell overall by 52 percent between 1970 and 2010, far faster than previously thought.

World Wildlife Fund - 2014

When the Toronto Zoo first opened more than 40 years ago, it was thought the planet was losing one or two species each year. International research released last year highlighted the staggering rate at which the world has lost thousands of species in the past four decades. The Toronto Zoo has a critical role to play to ensure the survival of many species, and particularly Canadian species. Now more than ever, the work the Toronto Zoo does to save and protect species and their habitats is critical to the ongoing survival of many of the world's most vulnerable species. That is why we are here. We are here because the Zoo is increasingly called upon to make critical contributions in the areas of wildlife care, research, veterinary and nutritional science and species preservation. We do this with many partners including conservation groups, governments, universities, environmental organizations and other wildlife care facilities globally. More than ever before, the work we do behind the scenes is vital to the survival of animals.

While we pride ourselves on the fact the Toronto Zoo is Canada's premier zoo and one of Toronto's most visited cultural institutions, we are most proud of the work we do behind the scenes to save and protect species and their habitats at home and abroad.

More than 50 million people have visited the Toronto Zoo and seen firsthand the more than 5000 animals in our care since it opened. But that is not the primary measure of our success. Rather, it is the work the Toronto Zoo does to save and protect species and their habitats, in Canada and around the world.

The Zoo's impact on wildlife and their habitats extends beyond our 700 acre site. The Toronto Zoo has been a leader in breeding programs and reproductive research aimed at reviving and returning endangered species to their native habitats. By releasing endangered species bred at the Zoo into the wild, the Toronto Zoo has helped to make great strides in preserving many of Canada's threatened and endangered animals including the wood bison, the black-footed ferret and the Vancouver Island marmot. Our work extends beyond Canadian borders, with the re-introduction of the Puerto Rican crested toad, field work with fish in Madagascar and contributing to many species survival plans throughout North America.

Our strategy going forward is to build on our successes to date with a new strategic plan intended to identify goals for the Toronto Zoo over the period from 2015-2020 as well

as specific objectives to help achieve those goals. We engaged Lord Cultural Resources, supported by Schultz and Williams, to work with us to develop what is believed to be the most inclusive strategic planning process in the history of the Toronto Zoo. Numerous workshops included the Toronto Zoo Board of Management, staff, volunteers, members and key stakeholders. The planning process was also informed by benchmarking and trends analyses as well as stakeholder interviews, surveys of members, volunteers, and on-site visitors. The Strategic Plan summarized here provides direction to guide the Board of Management and staff in our actions and decisions. While we are proud of our successes, we are even more enthusiastic about what together we will accomplish in the next five years and beyond.



John Tracogna,  
CEO,  
Toronto Zoo

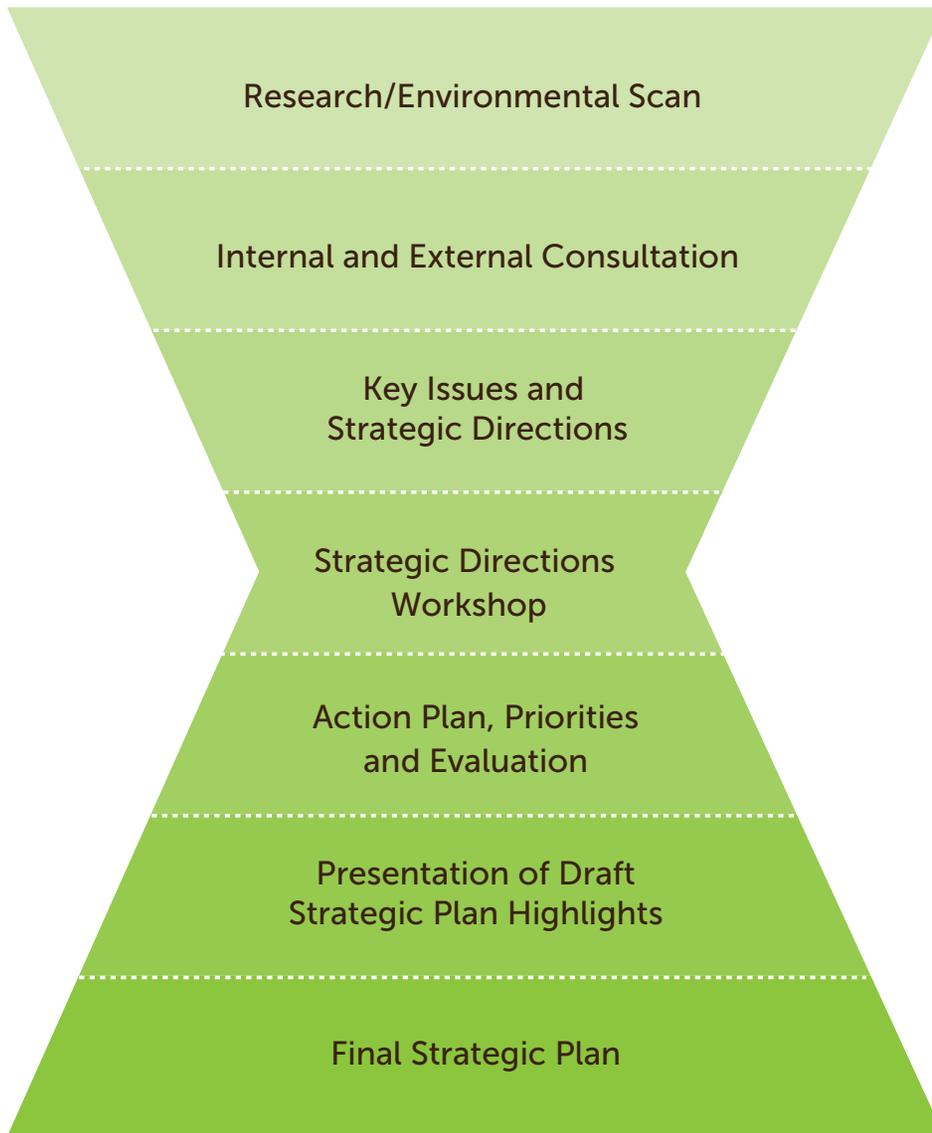


Joe Torzsok,  
Board Chair,  
Toronto Zoo



The strategic planning process to guide the Toronto Zoo from 2015 – 2020 was led by Lord Cultural Resources and may be summarized in the following diagram.

## 2. THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS



- 7** Initial Workshops with:

  - ★ Board Members, Senior Management
  - 85** Staff
  - 29** Volunteers
  - + Existing and Potential Partners
- 631** Online Survey respondents.
- 6** Teams of staff worked on Action Plans.

# 3. THE EVOLUTION OF ZOOS AND THE TORONTO ZOO

While strategic planning is about the future, it is beneficial to consider the evolution of zoos as well. Accredited zoos have undergone a transformation, and as a result they have come a long way from the days in which they were menageries that housed animals and that were organized taxonomically (monkey house, cat house). Today's modern "progressive" zoos feature programs with exhibits designed to match each animal's specific habitat. Accredited modern zoos are very much tied to conservation and education and are ambassadors for the species they help to conserve.

The Toronto Zoo wants to take this one step further - to become a **Zoo-Based Conservation Centre of Excellence**. This means being a leader in wildlife conservation and advocating for wildlife and habitats. It means focusing on Canadian species and habitats while continuing to be active globally.

When visitors see our exhibits they see only part of the program. For example, the polar bear program is not just an exhibit, it also consists of reproductive research, scientific research in nutrition, veterinary care, education, etc.

This strategic direction and our continuing evolution is supported by our renewed mission and vision and guided by our core values and institutional goals and objectives.



19<sup>th</sup>  
century

Menageries

## EVOLUTION OF ZOOS



20<sup>th</sup>  
century

Taxonomic  
Based

1974

Toronto Zoo  
Opens

21<sup>st</sup>  
century

Zoo Based  
Conservation Centre

As part of the strategic planning process, new institutional statements were developed to reflect the evolving direction of the Toronto Zoo. Our mission answers the question: "Why do we exist?" Our vision conveys the impact that the Toronto Zoo will make on its various communities. Our six core values are the principles that are, and will be, embedded in our practices to guide us in our daily conduct.

## 4. OUR MISSION, VISION, & VALUES





## OUR MISSION:

A living centre for education and science, committed to providing compelling guest experiences and inspiring passion to protect wildlife and habitats.

## OUR VISION:

Canada's national leader in saving wildlife to ensure the rich diversity of nature for future generations.



## OUR CORE VALUES:



### EXCELLENCE

We ensure the highest standard of care for wildlife, provide excellent guest service and create fun and transformational experiences that connect people to nature.



### CONSERVATION

We are committed to practicing and promoting activities and actions that benefit wildlife and the environment.



### INNOVATION

We encourage creativity, strive to think differently and turn our ideas into actions.



## COLLABORATION

We conduct ourselves in a manner that fosters respect and teamwork among staff, volunteers and our partners to achieve our mutual goals.



## INTEGRITY

We are transparent and committed to best practices and leading by example.



## PASSION

We are proud, energetic and passionate about saving wildlife and will inspire others to value the critical role of our Zoo.

A photograph of two white lion cubs sitting on a rocky ledge. The cub on the right is looking directly at the camera, while the one on the left is looking slightly to the side. The background shows more rocks and some green grass.

# 5. OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTION

As the Toronto Zoo looks toward the future, we will build on the many successes we have achieved over the past forty years and be inspired by our new strategic direction. The seven institutional goals that have emerged in the strategic planning process represent our strategic direction for the next five years. These are described here in the following pages.

## Conservation Impact

# GOAL 1: Advance to a zoo-based conservation centre of excellence



*Model of new state-of-the-art Wildlife Health Centre set to open in 2017.*

The role of the Toronto Zoo, one of the largest facilities of its kind in the world, has progressively evolved since its doors first opened 40 years ago. While the Zoo draws approximately 1.3 million visitors annually, allowing them a glimpse of species they might never see otherwise, the Zoo's priorities have increasingly broadened. The focus of the Toronto Zoo is on saving and protecting species through best practices and leadership in animal care, and innovative research and education throughout Canada and around the world.

Ever-increasing environmental challenges compel us to further advance our efforts to save and protect species at home and abroad. Now is the time for us to take a stand, to lead by example, and make

conservation the foundation of everything the Toronto Zoo does. We are well positioned to take on this leadership role in Canada. We will have an even greater focus on broader conservation outcomes and will strive to become the premier institution in Canada for the preservation and protection of endangered species, and in particular threatened Canadian species. Through leadership in education, innovative research and programs we will continue to inspire our guests and future conservationists to participate in our conservation efforts.



# Working Together to Fight Extinction



The Toronto Zoo is a leader in Canadian species recovery and in June 1975, was a founding member of Canada’s Accredited Zoos and Aquariums (CAZA), creating a national voice for the zoo and aquarium community. Today, CAZA members participate in close to 800 conservation and science programs within their facilities and are involved in multiple field projects, most linked directly to helping save endangered species and habitats. CAZA’s Canadian Endangered Species Programs (CESP), a series of long-term breeding and conservation plans, acts as an insurance policy against extinction for key Canadian endangered species including Vancouver Island marmots, burrowing owls, loggerhead shrikes, Blanding’s turtles, wolverines and black-footed ferrets.

The Toronto Zoo is proud to participate in many conservation programs, not only nationally but also internationally, including Recovery Teams and reintroduction programs, Taxon Advisory Groups (TAG), Species Survival Plan® (SSP), and Scientific Advisory Groups (SAG). The purpose of these programs is to cooperatively manage threatened and endangered species population sustainability working with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA), Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), CAZA accredited facilities and other related conservation organizations. The key mission is to collaborate and establish partnerships to develop action plans that identify essential

goals, scientific investigations, education messaging and conservation initiatives needed to best serve the animals in our care and ecosystems around the globe.

At present, the Toronto Zoo participates in seven Canadian Recovery Teams, 43 AZA TAGs and 138 AZA SSPs to help ensure genetically healthy and demographically diverse populations for many threatened and endangered species including the giant panda, polar bear, red side dace, Massasauga rattlesnake and black-footed penguin to name just a few. In addition, the Toronto Zoo actively participates in Global Species Management Plans (GSMPs) that focus on cooperatively managed breeding programs and conservation efforts at a global level to ensure the ongoing survival of species such as Sumatran tiger and red panda.

Currently, the Toronto Zoo spends approximately 25% of its operating budget to support conservation and education activities and has established the Endangered Species Reserve Fund (ESRF) to support Canadian species and other critical projects around the world, further emphasizing our ongoing commitment to fighting extinction. In the coming years, the Toronto Zoo will direct more resources to Canadian conservation programs and strive to build our international conservation programs, to ensure our work delivers meaningful conservation outcomes.



## Guest Engagement

# GOAL 2: Enhance the guest experience to appeal to a more diverse audience and inspire conservation action

Situated on more than 700 acres, the Toronto Zoo is home to more than 5,000 animals with an even larger plant population. Over the Zoo's 40 year history, we have welcomed more than 50 million visitors to our site. During this time, the Zoo has evolved to enhance our guests experience to ensure they become not only repeat visitors but are inspired by their experiences at the Zoo.

We understand our guests are critical to successfully fulfilling our new mission and vision. We will continue to provide visitors with truly memorable and fun experiences that will make a lasting impression and motivate them to take actions to save and protect wildlife. We will do this through revitalized exhibits that will better demonstrate to our visitors the breadth and depth of our programs that exist behind the scenes to support each exhibit, increased animal encounters, more interactions with staff and volunteers, improved wayfinding, and high quality services that inspire people to take conservation actions that have a positive impact on wildlife and their habitats. The result will be guests who become our proud supporters, who convey their experience to others, and motivate more people to visit the Zoo and participate in our conservation efforts.

We will inspire our guests to take actions in their everyday lives to make a difference and we will embrace new technologies to enhance our guest experience with the animals in our care which are ambassadors for their counterparts in the wild.

We have a renewed commitment to deliver enhanced programs that engage diverse communities and new audiences, opening the door to people who may not have had the opportunity to experience the Toronto Zoo in the past.



Governance

GOAL 3:  
Enhance the  
governance  
structure



3

The Toronto Zoo is a publicly owned asset governed by a Board of Management. In the last few years, the Board of Management has made significant progress on defining the governance structure of the Toronto Zoo. This includes the relationship between the Board and the City of Toronto, as well as the potential to improve fundraising and private support for the Zoo.

This Strategic Plan includes actions that reflect the governance work that remains to be done. For example, there is a need to update the land agreement with the Zoo, the City and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), and also to develop a relationship framework between the City and the Zoo.

The Board of Management membership changes on a periodic basis, coinciding with the new term of City Council. To build a strong Board, the Strategic Plan includes tasks, such as providing a comprehensive orientation, to enable new Board members to understand the focus of the Toronto Zoo and its strategic direction, and to perform their role effectively. This work will establish a sound and effective governance structure, which is critical for accomplishing all of our strategic goals.

## Financial Stability

# GOAL 4: Build an organization that is fiscally and environmentally sustainable for the long term

# 4

To ensure the Toronto Zoo advances to a zoo-based conservation centre of excellence, a stable financial base with funding to support enhanced conservation and research programs and site operations and infrastructure is essential.

A key thrust for achieving financial sustainability is the creation of a new charitable fundraising entity separate from the Toronto Zoo. It will be important for the Board of Management and staff to be aligned with the fundraising entity and to work in tandem to achieve our institutional goals. A Master Plan to follow will identify the Zoo's priority capital needs over the long-term and will inform a potential new capital campaign. Likewise, the Zoo will outline its operating program needs for a Canadian conservation focus, to enable the new fundraising entity to raise the required funds.

Over the years, the Toronto Zoo has been steadily growing its earned revenue, which encompasses revenue from admissions, parking, food services, group events, rides, retail, and sponsorships among others. A comparison of peer zoos indicates that the Toronto Zoo outperforms most of these zoos. Nevertheless, there is some growth potential that can be achieved by expanding current programs, such as group events, and introducing new experiences aligned with the needs of our guests. This is critical as

these increased earned revenues will enable us to deliver more conservation, education and scientific research programs.

Operational efficiency is also a key determinant in our financial health. As a public entity, we commit to best business practices and review our operations on a continuous basis looking for cost savings and efficiencies to enhance our sustainability. We will also continue to implement the Toronto Zoo's Green Plan to achieve our goals of a lower ecological footprint and a more efficient and productive environment.





## Strategic Alliances

# GOAL 5: Maximize existing partnerships and identify new opportunities

# 5

To be successful, The Toronto Zoo must work collaboratively with our current partners and seek new partners who believe in our renewed mission and vision. With scarce resources and the ever-pressing need for a diverse range of programs, the answer lies in leveraging cooperative alliances with others.

The Toronto Zoo is fortunate to be situated at the gateway of the new Rouge National Urban Park (RNUP). As it exists today, the RNUP spans more than 47 square kilometres and encompasses an area which includes portions of the City of Toronto, York Region and Durham Region.

There is tremendous potential for synergies between the Zoo and the new federal park with benefits for both entities. These include enhancing cross-over visitation between Park and Zoo guests, joint programs in areas such as conservation, education and research and possibly shared infrastructure opportunities. With the RNUP being located within the heart of Canada’s largest and most diverse metropolitan area, the Zoo and the park can work together on the common goal of connecting more Canadians to nature. This special relationship can serve to solidify and reinforce that the Toronto Zoo is a national leader in wildlife conservation, particularly with Canadian species and habitats.



Likewise, there are various educational institutions, government agencies and non-governmental organizations that can assist the Toronto Zoo in achieving its vision. By inviting new partners and strengthening our current relationships, this will lead to greater support for the new directions established in this Strategic Plan. An example of one of our current partnerships is the Turtle Island Conservation (TIC) program. TIC respectfully shares the hopes and goals of First Nations partners in our commitment to the preservation of biodiversity. TIC partners with First Nations communities to preserve community knowledge and significant natural and cultural landscapes.

Additionally, we want to build on our corporate partnership programs. This includes elevating key sponsors that fully support the Zoo’s programs to become “principal” sponsors, which broadens their scope of involvement with the Zoo. The ultimate outcome is to connect more sponsors, donors and partners with the Zoo, at various levels of engagement, to realize greater resource contributions so that the Zoo can deliver on mutually beneficial goals and actions that support the new vision.

THE **Only Zoo** IN  
NORTH AMERICA  
AT THE GATEWAY TO A

# National Urban Park



Parks  
Canada

Parcs  
Canada



Rouge National Urban Park



**toronto**  
**ZOO**

York Region

Durham Region

City of  
Toronto

Lake Ontario

\*Park boundaries subject to final approvals

Not to scale.



## People

# GOAL 6: Create an organizational culture that attracts, engages and retains highly motivated staff and volunteers

# 6



Our people encompass our staff, our volunteers and our service providers. The Toronto Zoo's transformation to a zoo-based conservation organization is predicated on harnessing and aligning the passion of our people with our strategic aims.

Essentially, our success lies with our people. We need to foster a culture throughout the organization that is built upon our six stated core values. This starts at the recruitment stage, before people enter the organization, and continues throughout their career at the Zoo. Our values of Excellence, Conservation, Innovation, Collaboration, Integrity and Passion will be embedded in our human resource policies, systems and processes to create a highly engaged workforce.

Our people at all levels in the organization will be encouraged through onboarding, training and development, communications and reward and recognition programs to embrace our mission, vision and core values. We will work to enhance our channels for communication to actively engage our people and thereby reinforce our desired culture. Every person in our organization will be empowered to become an ambassador for the Toronto Zoo.

## *Understanding & Caring*

# GOAL 7: Increase awareness, understanding and support of the Zoo as a centre for conservation excellence



Behind every animal is a story. Whether the animal is a critically endangered species or an ambassador for its counterpart in the wild, each animal in our care enables our guests to make connections and create emotional bonds.

The extensive work the Toronto Zoo does behind the scenes in the “hidden zoo” is a true testament to the exceptional people who work here every day. There are many stories of hope and survival and there is an incredible need to bring these stories to life and share with our guests and the public. These compelling stories will build a strong alignment between the guest experience and life sciences areas of the Zoo, so that our conservation efforts and guest experiences are inextricably linked.



While efforts have increased recently to further highlight the efforts of Zoo staff to save and protect species at home and abroad, more needs to be done to demonstrate the zoo-based conservation organization. Through multiple communication channels, including social media, we will increase awareness and understanding for our renewed mission and vision and increase support for our zoo-based conservation organization.

The Toronto Zoo believes it has a shared responsibility to care for the wildlife on this planet, and the Zoo works hard to be a leader in efforts to save animals and habitats that need help. This five-year Strategic Plan reinforces our commitment.



## **WHAT YOU SEE WHEN YOU VISIT THE ZOO IS ONLY THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG!**

There is so much that happens behind what you see at the Zoo. With our partners, we lead comprehensive and innovative conservation, research and education programs that are not necessarily seen by our visitors, but support the animal exhibits on-site.

# TORONTO ZOO PROGRAMS



Wildlife Health Centre



Reproductive Sciences and Research

Nutrition and Research



Veterinary Sciences and Research



Animal Care and Enrichment Programs

Education Programs



Saving Species and Protecting Habitats Programs



# 6. TURNING OUR GOALS INTO ACTION



The seven institutional goals are supported by specific objectives and an action plan. Some of the key objectives in support of the goals follow.



## CONSERVATION IMPACT

### GOAL 1:

Advance to a zoo-based conservation centre of excellence

Objective 1	Establish the Toronto Zoo as the national leader in wildlife conservation, with a focus on Canadian species and habitats.
Objective 2	Achieve a sustainable wildlife population with a high degree of biodiversity within the Zoo.
Objective 3	Provide exemplary care to the Zoo's wildlife population.
Objective 4	Invest in renewal of facilities and infrastructure to meet and exceed standards and regulations.



## GUEST ENGAGEMENT

### GOAL 2:

Enhance the guest experience to appeal to a more diverse audience and inspire conservation action

Objective 1	Revitalize existing exhibits and amenities and develop new memorable experiences, to increase support for the renewed mission of the Zoo.
Objective 2	Advance accessibility on the Zoo site.
Objective 3	Create various opportunities for new audiences to connect with and support the new mission and to increase revenue and attendance.
Objective 4	Increase staff and volunteer interactions with guests to further enhance conservation awareness and the role of the Zoo in achieving that goal.



## GOVERNANCE

### GOAL 3: Enhance the governance structure

Objective 1	Establish a separate fundraising entity to be the support organization for the Zoo.
Objective 2	Update framework and legal agreements to define the role and responsibilities of the Board of Management.
Objective 3	Enable strategic leadership of the Board of Management.



## FINANCIAL STABILITY

### GOAL 4:

Build an organization that is fiscally and environmentally sustainable for the long term

Objective 1	Nurture a strong and supportive relationship with the new fundraising entity to facilitate significant contributions to the Zoo.
Objective 2	Increase earned revenue through the creation of new experiences and programs.
Objective 3	Review internal processes to gain operational efficiencies.



## STRATEGIC ALLIANCES

### GOAL 5: Maximize existing partnerships and identify new opportunities

Objective 1	Develop a strong partnership with the Rouge National Urban Park.
Objective 2	Develop other strategic alliances using a diverse platform of conservation actions and stewardship programs.
Objective 3	Establish compelling opportunities for partners, sponsors and donors to support wildlife and habitats in our priority areas and our conservation focus.



## PEOPLE

### GOAL 6:

Create an organizational culture that attracts, engages and retains highly motivated staff and volunteers

Objective 1	Enhance internal communications so that employees and volunteers understand and embrace the Zoo's mission, vision, values and goals.
Objective 2	Ensure that the recruitment and selection process reflects our culture and core values.
Objective 3	Provide learning and development programs that meet the identified needs of staff and volunteers to allow us to excel in our roles.
Objective 4	Improve reward and recognition programs to reinforce the Zoo's core values and to better engage and motivate staff and volunteers.



## UNDERSTANDING & CARING

### GOAL 7:

Increase awareness, understanding and support of the Zoo as a centre for conservation excellence

Objective 1	Assess the Toronto Zoo identity and re-position to align with the new mission, vision and goals.
Objective 2	Through school and education programs, inspire current and future generations to become active stewards of wildlife conservation.
Objective 3	Update the Membership Program to inspire our Members to be champions for the Zoo.
Objective 4	Increase awareness of donation opportunities to support the priority needs of the Zoo.
Objective 5	Increase the Zoo's visibility within Canada and promote understanding and support of our critical conservation role.
Objective 6	Redesign the website and increase use of social media to communicate our conservation message.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The development of this Strategic Plan would not have been possible without the leadership of the Strategic Planning Steering Committee, the guidance of the Board of Management of the Toronto Zoo, and the input of our partners, staff, volunteers, members, and guests. We gratefully thank them for their input and support. We would also like to thank the many key individuals who participated in confidential one-on-one interviews.





TORONTOZOO.COM