



# CONSERVATION

SAVING WILDLIFE &  
PROTECTING WILD PLACES

# CONSERVATION STRATEGIC PLAN

## 2024-2028



Completed on June 1, 2024



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# I. INTRODUCTION TO THE MARYLAND ZOO'S CONSERVATION PROGRAM

## A. Background and Purpose

The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore (MZIB, or hereafter Maryland Zoo or “Zoo”) was founded in 1876 as a zoological menagerie, like most such institutions of the time. Over the years, the Zoo has changed its purpose and mission from a place of entertainment to a destination for education of visitors, inspiring them with the animals in our care. In our rapidly changing world, the number of animal species and the health of ecosystems have been in a steep decline, making the need to conserve the wild counterparts of our zoo animals increasingly more urgent. Today, optimal animal welfare of the Zoo’s inhabitants and protection of their wild counterparts are at the forefront of both the public’s expectations of zoos, as well as the Zoo’s goals, affecting everything we do and strive for.

After several decades of notable conservation action by various staff and departments throughout the Zoo, a cohesive conservation program and conservation department were formed in 2017. In May 2017, the Zoo initiated a conservation strategic planning process to determine the functions of this new Conservation Program and the future of conservation, research, and sustainability at MZIB. This first strategic plan involved multiple committees of different stakeholders, including managers, keepers, and board members.

The Zoo’s Conservation Program encompasses three main pillars:

1. Conservation/field work (in-situ efforts)
2. Scientific research
3. Sustainability

Each of these pillars have associated committees to continue to decide and implement actions:

1. Conservation/field work
  - a. The Conservation Strategic Planning Committee has continued to be the core committee for decision-making for the Zoo’s conservation programs.
2. Scientific research
  - a. The Zoo’s research projects, both those led by Zoo staff and the Zoo’s collaborations with outside researchers, are reviewed by the MZIB Research Committee.
  - b. The Zoo has a formal Research Plan and Research Policy to direct this portion of the Conservation Program.
  - c. This program also includes behavioral research at the Zoo.

### 3. Sustainability

- a. The MZIB Sustainability Committee consists of various staff from different departments and levels across the Zoo that implements the sustainability plan and works through zoo-wide sustainability issues and actions.
- b. A comprehensive Sustainability Plan was published in 2023 by the MZIB Sustainability Committee with the guidance of a sustainability consultant from Lorax Partnerships, LLC.

Much of the 2018-2023 Conservation Strategic Plan has been followed and accomplished and was effective at motivating and guiding staff. As the MZIB Conservation Program has expanded and evolved, and the Zoo itself as well as the city of Baltimore and the world have changed drastically in the past five years, new priorities and directions are needed. The need to save wildlife and protect wild places has only become direr, and the need for our call to action has never been greater.

## B. Stakeholders

### **Methods for input into the 2024 update to the Conservation Strategic Plan:**

#### **Conservation Strategic Planning Committee:**

Staff involved: Select managers, directors, vice presidents in various strategic MZIB departments, as well as CEO

Role: Main group collecting input from and representing departments and staff throughout the Zoo to make the revisions and updates to this plan.

#### **Conservation and Sustainability Listening Sessions:**

Staff involved: Any staff member is invited to attend these every 2-3 month lunchtime sessions that occurred starting in fall 2022 and are ongoing.

Role: Meetings are designed to provide updates and collect general feedback to the entire program and to specific topics of the updated Conservation Strategic Plan and Sustainability Plan.

#### **Animal Care Committee of the Board of Trustees (ACC)**

Members: Select members of the MZIB board of trustees, already engaged in animal programs.

Purpose: Provide feedback to the strategic planning process, and also to inform the full board of trustees of conservation program progress.

## C. Glossary of Abbreviations

AAC = Arctic Ambassador Center (a program of Polar Bears International)

ACC = Animal Care Committee (of the Maryland Zoo Board of Trustees)

AZA = Association of Zoos and Aquariums

CAP = Conservation Action Program

CSPC = Conservation Strategic Planning Committee

EVACC = El Valle Amphibian Conservation Center Foundation

HAZWOPER = Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (federal training required to respond to oiling emergencies)

MZIB = Maryland Zoo in Baltimore or Maryland Zoo or "Zoo"

SAFE = Saving Animals from Extinction (AZA conservation programs for a species or group of species)

SAP = Signature Animal Program (at the Maryland Zoo in Baltimore)

SSA = Service Systems Associates (partner/vendor for food service and gift shop amenities at the Zoo)

SWOT = Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

## D. Vision and Mission

**Vision** (slightly amended from original 2018 vision):

Conserving wildlife for future generations, through our dedication and unique expertise gained working with animals, to foster species survival in thriving ecosystems.

**Mission:**

Saving wildlife and protecting wild places



## II. STRATEGIES AND IMPLEMENTATION

### A. Overarching categories and strategies:

We identified three overarching categories and themes with several strategies for each. Each strategy has SMART goals with long-term and short-term outcomes, outputs, activities, and inputs associated with them (see separate Google document). These goals were greatly expanded with much more detail compared to the initial Conservation Strategic Plan from 2018 and will allow us to track and evaluate our progress over the next five years of this plan in these categories.

#### SMART goals:

**Specific**

**Measurable**

**Achievable**

**Relevant**

**Time-bound**

#### 1. Conservation on Campus: Nurture a culture of conservation throughout the Zoo.

- Conservation and sustainability are part of everyone's job at the Zoo.
- Conservation and sustainability are part of all decision-making processes at the Zoo.
- The Zoo's internal communication reflects its commitment to a culture of conservation.

#### 2. Conservation in our Community: Be a driving force for conservation in our community.

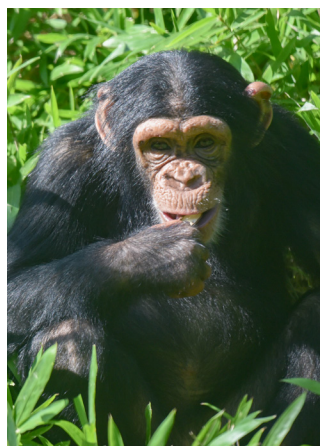
- The Maryland Zoo is a recognized conservation leader in Baltimore and beyond.
- The Zoo activates its local community to save wildlife and protect wild places.
- Visitors to the Zoo actively participate in conservation.
- The Zoo is a leader in sustainability efforts in Baltimore.
- The Zoo's external communication supports its conservation actions with consistency, transparency, and accessibility.

#### 3. Conservation Collaborations: Deepen and broaden our collaborations with conservation, research, and sustainability partners around the globe.

- Collaborations between Zoo staff and other researchers support evidence-based animal management.
- The Zoo manages its SAFE program participation to optimize use of resources.
- The Zoo supports key conservation partners in Maryland and throughout the world to protect habitats and ensure the persistence of species.

### B. Conservation Program Criteria

The Maryland Zoo's Conservation Program consists of two categories of programs, the Signature Animal Program and the Conservation Action Program. Additionally, the Wildlife Response Fund builds the third pillar of the program. Below are the definitions and criteria outlined for each program.



## **Signature Animal Program (SAP):**

### Criteria (each program should meet most or all of the following):

- Highly visible species at the Zoo
- Expertise at the Zoo with this species in most, if not all, of the following:
  - a. Husbandry
  - b. Breeding
  - c. Education
  - d. Medical care
  - e. Research
  - f. Conservation
- Strong collaboration and connection with select conservation partners working on this species in the field
- Significant financial support of conservation partners
- Priority for sending staff to the field
- Involvement in SAFE program (Saving Animals from Extinction) for the species or group of species (see MZIB SAFE Project Integration Plan, Appendix 3 of this document)

The Zoo has the following current SAPs, with no current plans to expand so that our conservation efforts are not diluted:

- **African elephant**
- **African penguin**
- **Chimpanzee**
- **Panamanian golden frog**
- **Maryland native species (includes native animals as well as plants)**



## Conservation Action Program (CAP):

### Criteria (each program should meet most or all of the following):

- Non-SAP species and does not need to be a species we have at the Zoo
- Should be an ecosystem-wide, a One Health, or a more complex project
- Long-term ongoing field project that the Zoo has previous and/or current strong involvement with
- Ideally is a MZIB-led project
- Priority for capacity building and exchange of experience and best practices
- Should provide valuable opportunities for staff in multiple departments/disciplines

The Zoo has the following current CAPs, which could be expanded if funding and time allows:

- **Bolivian species conservation** (maned wolf, Bolivian river dolphin)
- **Polar bear conservation/Arctic Ambassador Center** in collaboration with Polar Bears International (PBI)

## Wildlife Response Fund:

### Criteria:

- Short-term urgent and one-time need (e.g. oiling event, fire, confiscation of endangered animals); not a long-term commitment
- Can be any species; prioritize SAP species and SAFE needs
- Priority for staff involvement
- Will be spent yearly and given to a project in need at end of year if not spent

## C. Conservation Messages

### Conservation Messages Overview

Conservation messages are the outcomes-based communication strategies zoos and aquariums use to educate and engage audiences on wildlife conservation, increase public awareness, and motivate pro-environmental actions.



Conservation messages highlight the work of the zoo or aquarium and connect audiences to its mission.

Conservation messages are embedded into every aspect of a zoo or aquarium's forward-facing work, including education programs, exhibits and signage, staff and volunteer interactions, events, marketing, and social media. They are powerful tools that every team member, whether staff or volunteer, should use consistently to engage with the audience.

## Methodology

The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore's conservation messages were developed during the concurrent conservation and education strategic planning processes. A subcommittee comprised of Conservation, Conservation Education, and Evaluation & Interpretation representatives worked with input from the broader conservation planning team and select Zoo staff.

*The full description of the background, methodology, audiences, roll-out, and evaluation are found in the Education Strategic Plan. Below is an abbreviated excerpt of the messages.*

## Conservation Messages and Intended Outcomes

### Our day-to-day choices have a local and global influence on wildlife and wild places.

*Intended Outcomes (skills- and behaviors-based, quantitative measurements)*

- Visitors, staff, and volunteers have the tools they need to know how their choices affect wildlife.
- Visitors, staff, and volunteers use these tools to effect positive conservation action.

### Wildlife is all around us, no matter where we live. We can be good "nature neighbors" by respecting and protecting local nature.

*Intended Outcomes (attitudes- and beliefs-based, qualitative measurements)*

- Visitors, staff, and volunteers have a more positive attitude about their local environment and their relationship to it.
- Visitors, staff, and volunteers demonstrate intentions to act to protect their local wildlife.

## Intended Conservation Message Use

Conservation messages are essential to all audience engagement to increase their effectiveness and the likelihood of an individual making a pro-environmental change. Each of the Zoo's freestanding plans (conservation, education, communication, and interpretive) should address how it will incorporate the messages into its work.

Conservation messages should underpin:

- All education programming
- Staff and volunteer interactions with guests (both formalized, like the Penguin Feeding Narration or the Outpost, and casual, like at the entry gate)

- Animal experiences and encounters
- Exhibits and signage, as new ones are designed, and existing ones are updated
- Public (free and ticketed) events
- Marketing campaigns
- Communications, especially on social media and the website as appropriate
- Development and fundraising campaigns

## **Audience Evaluation**

The Director of Interpretation & Evaluation will take primary responsibility for the ongoing assessment and evaluation of the conservation messages, modifying tools and methods that are already in use, and designing new ones as needed/necessary. The Conservation Education department will also deploy various evaluation techniques, including in-program assessments and post-program surveys. Marketing and Communications can track audience engagement through online and social media avenues. Finally, Events and Development may wish to track the success of events, fundraising, and grant initiatives that use the conservation messages as drivers.



## APPENDIX: LIST OF MZIB CONSERVATION PARTNERS

- *African penguin* SAP: Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB) and African Penguin SAFE Emergency Response Project/Namibian Foundation for the Conservation of Seabirds (NAMCOB)
- *African elephant* SAP: Elephants for Africa (Efa) and International Elephant Foundation (IEF)
- *Panamanian golden frog* SAP: El Valle Amphibian Conservation Center Foundation (EVACC)
- *Chimpanzee* SAP: Chimpanzee SAFE
- *Polar bear* CAP: Polar Bears International (PBI)
- Sahara Conservation Fund
- Mabula Ground Hornbill Project
- Madagascar Fauna Group
- Okapi Conservation Fund
- Turtle Survival Alliance
- *Maryland Native Species* SAP: Susquehannock Wildlife Society
- *Maryland Native Species* SAP: Anita C Leight Estuary (Otter Creek Point)
- Cheetah Conservation Fund
- Giraffe Conservation Fund
- African People and Wildlife

### Other support:

- AZA Conservation Grant Fund
- Wildlife Response Fund

