



Date: Wednesday, Nov. 8, 2017  
To: Oregon Zoo Bond Citizens' Oversight Committee  
From: Grant Spickelmier, Oregon Zoo Education Curator  
Heidi Rahn, Oregon Zoo Bond Program Director  
Subject: **Preliminary report on Oregon Zoo Education Center program outcomes**

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The Oregon Zoo Bond Citizens' Oversight Committee reports annually on progress on Zoo Bond investments. In the committee's 2017 annual report, members requested an update regarding the programming and operations of the new Education Center. This report summarizes the primary activities taking place in the Oregon Zoo Education Center from its opening on March 2, 2017 through September 30, 2017 and provides a general update of progress towards accomplishing its goals.

## Goals

The Education Center transformed the west side of the zoo's campus. Its goals were to:

1. Build zoo audiences' understanding that *small things matter* – in nature, conservation and personal actions. Small things aggregate to have a big impact.
2. Inspire zoo visitors to take conservation action (use less, explore nature, give back, speak out).
3. Increase capacity to engage diverse audiences in conservation education.
4. Raise the visibility and support the work of nature, conservation and sustainability organizations by connecting them with zoo audiences.
5. Generate revenue to offset operation costs.
6. Showcase green living and sustainable practices (achieve LEED gold or higher).

In spring 2018, the zoo will evaluate progress towards accomplishing goals 1 and 2. **This memo focuses on progress towards goals 3 through 6.**

## Status Report

### **Goal 3 – Increase capacity to engage diverse audiences in conservation education.**

The Education Center provides a primary hub for education activities formerly housed across the zoo and greatly increases our capacity for educational programming.

Features:

- Seven new classrooms and three tent sites
- Effective new entrance for drop-off/pick-up of school groups and Zoo Camp

- New technologies in the Pika Science Lab that encourage inquiry
- New early childhood classroom (Acorn) with furniture scaled for small children
- New work space for Zoo Teens and Zoo Animal Presenters (ZAPs)

**Results:**

- 649 participants attended wildlife lectures, naturalist classes and citizen science trainings.
- Zoo Teens engaged more than 35,000 people in the Nature Exploration Station and new Insect Zoo .
- Summer camps increased from 3,004 to 3,564 participants – a 19 percent increase in two years and anticipated to rise to 4,000.
- Donations to the Oregon Zoo Foundation are enabling 10,000 third graders from Title 1 schools across the region to visit the zoo and attend ZooSchool.
- Distance learning pilot activities delivered in schools in Bend, Oregon and Springwater, Missouri.
- Zoo Teens won third place in Polar Bear International’s climate change action competition.
- The zoo is piloting new early childhood programming this November.

**Goal 4 – Raise the visibility and support the work of nature, conservation and sustainability organizations by connecting them with zoo audiences.**

The zoo aimed to establish at least eight partnerships. To our delight, **30** organizations signed up, with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and Metro Resource Conservation and Recycling hiring additional staff to provide programming at the center. Other highlights include:

- Partners reported engaging more than 20,000 guests.
- Oregon State University Extension Service master gardener volunteers engaged more than 10,000 zoo visitors in the Wildlife Garden, providing tips on how to make backyards and communities more wildlife-friendly.
- Embedded U.S. Fish and Wildlife staff Leah Schrodt helped develop “CSI – Conservation Science Investigators” summer camp, featuring federal officers that prosecute wildlife trafficking in the U.S.
- The center hosted the Active Transportation Summit, the Children and Nature Symposium, the N.W. Zoo and Aquarium Association meeting and the Environmental Education Association of Oregon, among many other regional gatherings.

**Goal 5 – Generate revenue to offset operation costs.**

The Education Center was designed to expand revenue generation through retail food sales and catering and to provide additional revenue-generating space. Trends for all areas are up. Here are some highlights:

- Spring break camp enrollment was 23 percent higher than in 2016.
- Summer camp revenues were up \$30,000.
- Catering and café sales combined were nearly \$350,000/year to date, almost \$200,000 more than projections.

**Goal 6 – Showcase green living and sustainable practices (achieve LEED gold or higher).**

The zoo's intent was to create "buildings that teach" through inspiring use of sustainable materials and technologies. Design features, such as toilets flushed with harvested rainwater and digitally-controlled high-efficiency lighting and HVAC systems, help us meet our sustainability goals and lower operational costs. Other highlights include:

- Bird-friendly glass and lighting designed by the American Bird Conservancy.
- Solar arrays deliver more than 200 kilowatts of electricity, putting this on track to be the first "Net-Zero Energy" operations zoo facility in the country and made possible in part by Portland General Electric Renewable Development Fund customers.
- Won the Energy Trust of Oregon's High Performance Building Award for New Construction at the Daily Journal of Commerce's Top Projects 2017 ceremony.
- The Education Center is in line to receive LEED gold status and has a shot at LEED platinum rating.

Interestingly, bird-friendly glass and the requirements to reach net-zero energy goals for the Nature Exploration Station have sometimes left visitors unclear whether the building is open. We continue making changes so that the building is more inviting to guests.

**Moving forward**

Nine months in, the zoo is making adjustments based on what we've learned and capitalizing on our successes. Over the next year we anticipate:

- Re-envisioning activities in the Nature Play area to increase durability and safety
- Requesting support from OZF for seven day/week staffing in the Nature Exploration Station
- Adding a new salmon egg exhibit in the Species Conservation Lab
- Conducting a summative interpretive evaluation (spring of 2018)

**Conclusion**

The Education Center at the Oregon Zoo has quickly become a local pillar of conservation education, with an impact that will continue to deepen each year. The center would not be the vital community resource that it is today without the tremendous support of the partners, donors and voters. In 2018, staff will share progress toward achieving goals 1 and 2 and the Education Center's role in increasing conservation awareness and action.

cc: Zoo Bond Steering Group