



ADVANCING CONSERVATION THROUGH
EMPATHY FOR WILDLIFE

aceforwildlife.org

Conservation Action Inventory Report

August 2022

Produced by Woodland Park Zoo, backbone support organization of ACE for Wildlife
empathy@zoo.org



Conservation Action Inventory Report

Overview

The Advancing Conservation through Empathy (ACE) for Wildlife Network's vision is "a conservation-minded society motivated by empathy towards all life." Through achieving our mission of "creating and sharing effective practices to foster empathy for animals and people," Network Partners can:

- foster empathy,
- promote conservation missions, and
- motivate visitors to take conservation action.

This report reflects an initial step to understand what the 20 ACE for Wildlife Network Partners are currently doing to address the latter two points. This inventory will inform how the Network can share learnings about organizational efforts and develop resources to support growth across the Network.

Methods

Between February and July 2022, an inventory of conservation actions was conducted with our 20 Network Partners. Tasks included:

- A review of Partner websites to learn more about the types of conservation actions they engage in and promote;
- A brief conversation during 20 check-in calls to identify the lead contact for conservation action messaging;
- A more in-depth conversation during 12 site visits with staff engaged in this work;
- A survey (n=20) documenting:
 - types of conservation calls to action,
 - methods of messaging, and
 - role of empathy in developing calls to action.

A review of the research about motivating conservation behavior change was also conducted but will be shared separately as part of the conservation action toolkit.

Key Findings

ACE for Wildlife Partners engage in promoting conservation actions primarily in four ways:

- Modeling conservation actions they have undertaken;

- Encouraging individual or community actions;
- Requesting donations or volunteer support for conservation causes; and,
- (To a lesser extent,) enlisting advocates to encourage governments and/or businesses to change.

Advice on how to encourage conservation actions included:

- "Connect before you correct" – build relationships, step into the work slowly to bring audience along;
- Highlight how animals are important to us, show why they should care;
- Give audiences a cause to support with animal births and deaths as they have a natural emotional pull;
- Include a public pledge to take an action;
- Be hopeful and optimistic; and
- Focus on one animal in front of them to highlight an issue like climate change; ask them to think about how they might react to changes in their environment.

Recommendations

Several recommendations came out of the conversations and data gathering:

- Develop conservation actions tied to a wider range of species, so it is easy to adapt to the animals Partners have;
- Share conservation event templates from Partners for others to adapt;
- Gather and share social media examples on different topics;
- Develop seasonal campaigns with longer lead time to build into Partners' planning;
- Identify and share resources on promising practices for conservation actions both in general and with effective empathy practices in particular; and
- Develop ways to measure impact of campaigns to have zoos/aquariums able to use, to assess overall impact.



Empathy's Relationship to Conservation Action

Purpose

While there is a great deal of research into the construct of empathy towards other humans and its role in encouraging caring behavior, research on the role of empathy in fostering caring action for animals and nature is more limited. The studies that have been conducted point to the potential role empathy can play in relation to conservation behavior.

Empathy with other forms of life is one component of environmental sensitivity, the positive emotional response that some individuals feel in relation to nature. Evoking empathy for a natural object, like a bird or tree, increases peoples' willingness to act in a way that protects the environment (Hungerford & Volk, 1990, Berenguer, 2007).

Taking the perspective of a distressed animal increased environmental concerns in a few different studies (Schultz, 2000; Sevillano et al., 2007). In another demonstration of the role of perspective taking, people who were given "empathy nudges," where they were asked to put themselves in the place of people affected by a conservation issue, were more likely to support conservation action than those who receive a financial incentive alone (Czap et al., 2015).

People who feel compassion for environmental distress are more likely to promote conservation of nature. Some research suggests that those who feel compassion for other humans are also more likely to hold pro-environmental values and intentions, and are more likely to donate to nature or environmental organizations (Pfattheicher et al., 2016).

The extent to which someone has moral reasons for protecting nature can be enhanced by evoking empathy, according to one study (Berenguer 2008). The same study found different results depending upon whether the focus of empathy was a vulture or a human. When the object of

empathy was a vulture, the number of moral arguments of an ecocentric nature increased (i.e., seeing intrinsic value in living things, regardless of their perceived value to humans); when it was a person, the number of moral arguments of an anthropocentric nature increased (i.e., interpreting the world in terms of human values and existence).

As our Network grows and projects are underway, we want to understand how Network Partners are utilizing the empathy practices to advance conservation missions and encourage guest action.

Definitions

For the purpose of creating a common vocabulary and shared understanding of terminology, the following is a list of vocabulary used throughout this report.

Advocacy refers to actions taken by Partners or calls to action that encourage guests to contact government officials or businesses in support of legislative or policy changes.

Calls to action are any statements by Partners that encourage audiences to change their behavior, voice their support for change and/or contribute (time or money) to a cause.

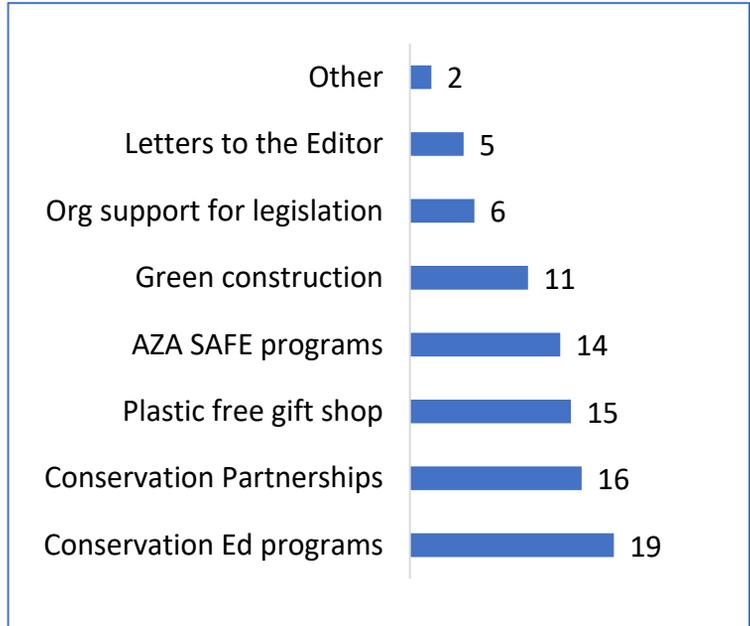
Conservation actions are any actions that benefit the environment and wildlife. These can be taken by Partners directly or encouraged to be taken by audiences.



Modeling Conservation Action

Network Partners are consistently taking actions internally to promote conservation. All but one organization highlights conservation actions in its education programs and 80% participate in conservation partnerships. Three quarters have moved to become plastic free and 70% participate in the Association of Zoos and Aquariums' (AZA) Saving Animals From Extinction (SAFE) programs. Just over half have utilized green construction in their facilities.

Where Partners are less active is in highlighting organizational support for legislation (30%) and writing letters to the editor about conservation issues (25%). Several mentioned that their governmental status was a barrier to participating in these types of activities. Clarification and confirmation about what they can do would be helpful in helping Partners capitalize on their role as a community leader in sharing their support for legislative or policies to support issues like the Endangered Species Act or Big Cats legislation.



Q1: Partner Conservation Actions Modeled to Visitors (# Yes/20)

Other examples noted were research and testing bear safe products.

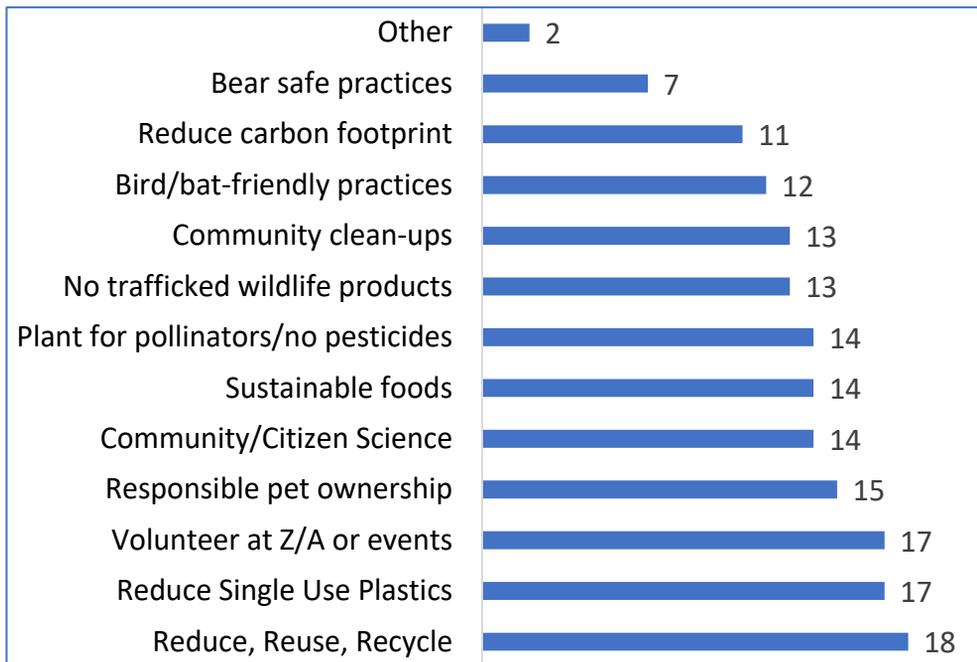
Modeling conservation actions occurs across signage, programs, interpretation, social media and Partner websites, with an average of 3.6 methods used per zoo.



Pictures taken of signage at Northwest Trek Wildlife Park, Henry Vilas Zoo and Lake Superior Zoo. SAFE picture from Como Park Zoo social media.



Encouraging Guests to Take Conservation Action



Q2: Types of Personal Actions Encouraged (# Yes/20)

In terms of asking audiences to take individual action or support projects in their communities, Network Partners are also quite active. Encouragement to reduce, reuse, recycle are the most popular, with 90% encouraging such actions. Reducing single use plastics is just behind with 85%. Likely the reason it is not universal is the barrier of limited access to recycling programs.

Volunteering whether at Partner facilities, community clean up events or through community science were also more than half in the 65-85% range. Responsible pet ownership came in high with 75%. This issue seems like an easier, self responsibility action to take, particularly at zoos where exotic pets are often surrendered. The related topic of being against trafficking of wildlife had 65% participation. It would be interesting to learn more about whether messaging is related to buying wildlife products, the exotic pet trade or both.

About 70% of Partners encourage guests to plant for pollinators and/or to avoid pesticide use. Sustainable foods, such as promoted through Seafood Watch and palm oil campaigns, are also featured at 70% of Partners.

Twelve zoos (60%) promote bird-safe practices and/or bat house construction among guests. These topics seem like an area for sharing resources and potential increase of empathy practices. Idaho Falls Zoo shared a bat conservation program they host that they have infused with empathy content and is quite successful. It will be included in the toolkit.

Reducing carbon footprint occurs at 55% of sites, but basically splits along state political lines. It would be interesting to consider how this topic might be promoted with a more conservative audience.

Only about a third of Partners promote bear safety, though 80% of Partners do have bears. This could be a potential area for growth as we have some Partners well-versed in this area.

Other ideas mentioned were discouraging carwashes at home (soap in sewer drains) and promoting safe boating distance from whales.

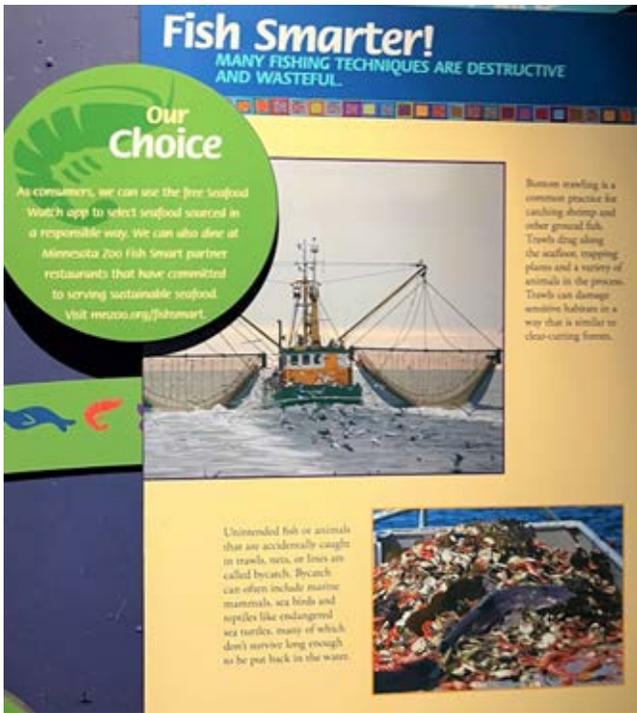
Partners promoting these actions do so across signage, programs, interpretation and social media, with less attention to website messaging with an average of 4.5 methods used per zoo.



Site Visit Examples of Calls to Action



While conducting site visits, there were many examples of conservation calls to action. Racine Zoo included “Take Action!” messaging directly on animal habitat signage, with a QR code for more information (see picture above).



Minnesota Zoo had an exhibit called “Our Ocean, Our Choice,” which highlighted several conservation issues and actions individuals could take. The sign above talks about sustainable seafood; other signs discussed plastics, protected marine areas, climate change, invasive species, protect coastal areas, encourage better fisheries management plans. They also have an interactive game where you can choose seafood from a menu to learn about more sustainable options.

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium had an exhibit encouraging guests to “Join Us! Be an Ocean Champion!” They share various actions the zoo and individuals can take, such as go plastic free, eat at ocean friendly restaurants, vote, grow a rain garden, and they also have computer kiosks where individuals could sign a pledge to take action. (see below).



The International Crane Foundation (ICF) encourages guests to share their support for wildlife and environmental protection with friends and family.

ICF highlights their efforts and individual actions guests can take to save cranes and how wetlands benefit many other species as well. This expands their reach beyond those who are focused on cranes.

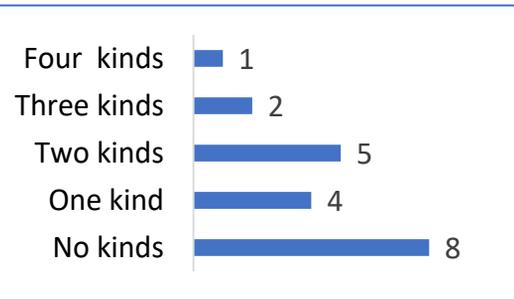




Support for Conservation Action

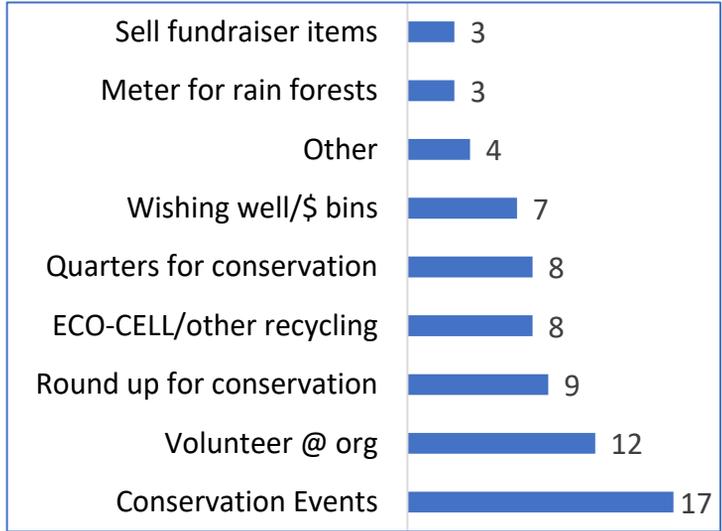
Defined as asking for audiences to contribute time or money to a conservation cause, 85% reported having conservation events. Events are a great way to raise awareness while providing a fun event for people to attend. About 60% described volunteering as a way to support conservation.

Twelve Partners utilize a range of small change fundraising options – rounding up ticket or gift shop charges for conservation, quarters for conservation, wishing wells or meters for the rain forest.



Q4B: How many small change donation programs do you have? (# Yes/20)

Partners encouraged support most in signage, social media, and interpretive messaging, less through programs and the website, with an average of 3.5 methods per zoo.

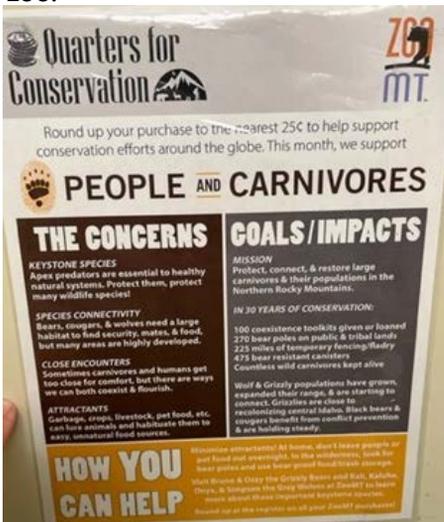


Q4: Types of Conservation Donation Asks (# Yes/20)

ECO-CELL and other recycling programs had 40% participation. Unique recycling included holiday lights, fishing line and batteries. Partners having those programs will be contacted for more information about those initiatives for the toolkit.

Fifteen percent sold fundraiser items like used books and black-footed ferret wristbands. “Other” noted items were animal adoptions, fees for feeding animals, fair trade items in the gift shop and Amazon Smile.

Two Partners did not ask for support from audiences from any of these.



Signage examples from ZooMontana, Zoo Boise and Lake Superior Zoo.

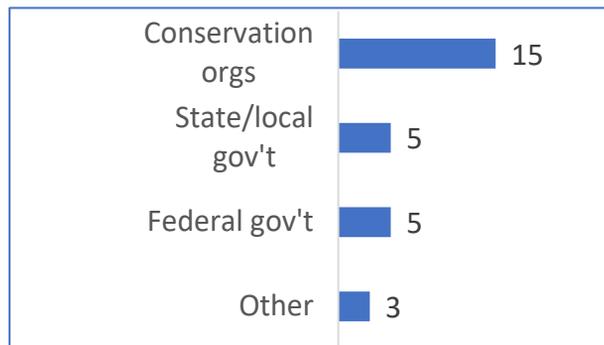


Enlisting Advocates For Change

Most ACE for Wildlife Partners encourage guests to support conservation efforts promoted by other conservation organizations (75%) like Polar Bears International, but only 25% actively encourage audiences to contact local, state, or federal government bodies about legislation impacting wildlife and conservation topics. Four who do advocacy are within Washington state. Five do not promote advocacy.

In interviews, several noted that they could not participate in advocacy due to their status as a governmental agency. Others mentioned hesitancy to be seen by their community as political. Therefore, efforts on this front should start with understanding these barriers.

The three “Other” topics noted were encouraging guests to participate in Advocacy Days, providing advocacy training for teen and adult volunteers and encouraging business to use sustainable palm oil. These could be useful examples of how to engage audiences and use Partner power to influence local companies to adopt conservation practices like using sustainable seafood or palm oil.

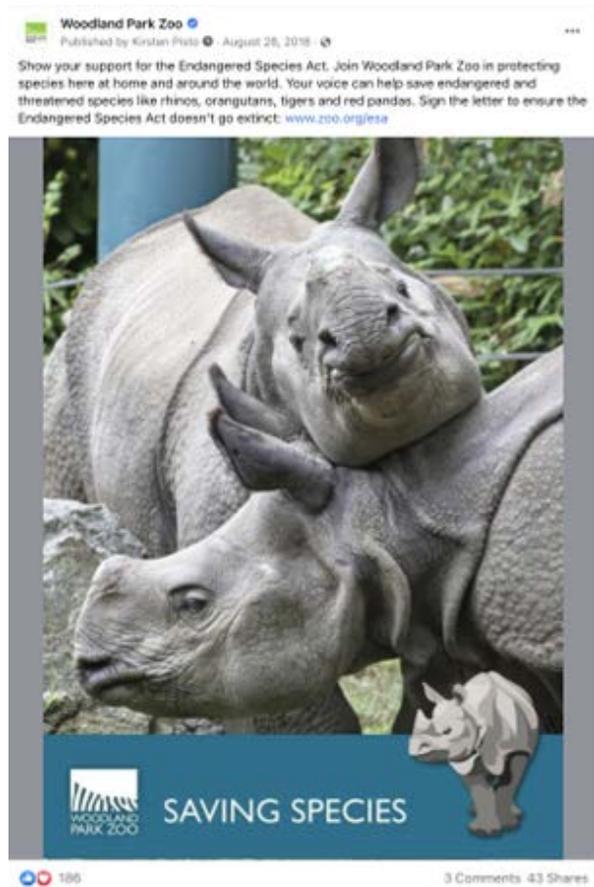


Q3: Types of Advocacy Calls to Action (# Yes/20)

Whereas signage was a primary way of communicating the other forms of conservation action, it was utilized by less than half for advocacy with an average of 2.6 methods used per zoo. Social media and individual interpretation messaging were most common.



These two posts are examples of advocacy from the Seattle Aquarium and Woodland Park Zoo.





Empathy in Promoting Conservation Action

When asked whether Partners utilized empathy practices in promoting conservation actions (perspective taking, storytelling, linking to a particular zoo resident), 75% said yes, 10% said they were working on incorporating empathy and 15% said they did not. Only 30% said they had evidence of the impact empathy has had on those actions. Though difficult to measure, there is a need to work on how to measure the impact of Partner efforts to promote conservation action.

“We have several ambassador/program animals whose personal stories are great for emphasizing why people shouldn't have exotic pets (like Arwin the turtle that has a shell deformity from improper care before he came to live with us).”

“When we talk about rainforest conservation, we ask people to think about themselves and their likes - for example, we share how coffee, orange juice and chocolate can be shade-grown and how guests can make choices that make a difference for animals like the ones they're meeting today.”

“Bat Night-an event we host at our zoo has received lots of positive feedback and people have told us they see and feel differently about bats after attending the event.”



What if with every sip of coffee, you were making a difference? By purchasing the Gorongosa Coffee, you are helping to protect endangered wildlife, create jobs, and provide healthcare for the people of Gorongosa. 100% of the coffee profits help fund conservation and human development projects in and around Gorongosa National Park. We believe that people and the planet can thrive together. Every cup of Gorongosa Coffee helps make this hope a reality for the animals and people of Gorongosa National Park in Mozambique.

“Our hope is that by understanding how our lives overlap with the lives and activities of wildlife, people will collectively have the tools to make choices that benefit wildlife through policy and everyday activities without promoting specific politics.”

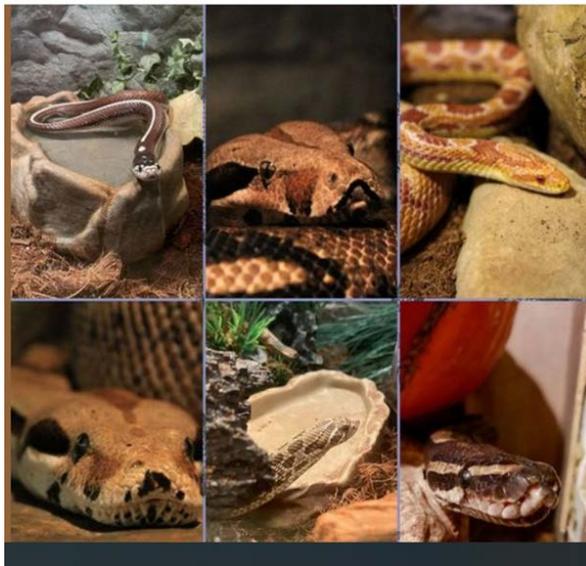


ZooMontana
July 16 at 9:00 AM

Happy World Snake Day from Taco, Leroy, Jonnie, Jenkins, Wilbur, and Harry 🐍

ZooMontana is home to these six special snakes across their five different species. Want to know what all but one of them have in common? Each of these individuals, except for Harry, were pet surrenders.

All too often snakes are adopted as “low-maintenance pets.” While you may not have to feed them often, snakes still require a lot of care to live a long and healthy life. Different species require different amounts and types of lighting, heating, humidity, bedding, and hiding spots. It is so important to always do extensive research before adopting your new friend!





Suggestions for Conservation Action Toolkit

During the site visit interviews and occasionally check-in calls when there was sufficient time, the following suggestions were mentioned in how Partners have thought about conservation action messaging:

- Connect before you correct – build relationships with audiences first, then encourage them to change their behavior whether that is not tapping on the glass or buying sustainable seafood;
- Step into the advocacy work slowly, start with something not particularly controversial and then bring the audience along;
- Convey ways animals are important to us and the environment, show why they matter to audiences and why they should care (e.g., turtles help clean the rivers that they swim in);
- Animal births and deaths have a natural emotional pull –give folks something to support as an outlet;
- Include a public pledge (supported by research that shows that people are more likely to follow through if they have publicly committed to doing something, McKenzie-Mohr, 2011);
- Be hopeful and optimistic (rather than focusing on doom and gloom); and

- Focus on one animal in front of them to highlight an issue and ask them to think about how they might react to changes in their environment. This can help take a big issue like climate change and make it more concrete and comprehensible.

BE A SALMON STEWARD

When wild salmon thrive, so can we. No matter where you live, you can help ensure that wild salmon and the ways of life they make possible will be with us forever.

6 Ways that YOU Can Help Wild Salmon

- PROTECT** existing healthy salmon habitat—streams, rivers, lakes, and the ocean.
- RESTORE** degraded salmon habitat and recover threatened and endangered populations.
- EAT** wild, not farmed, salmon.
- DEMAND** climate change solutions that ensure a future for wild salmon.
- SUPPORT** sustainable salmon management informed by best available science and Indigenous knowledge.
- RESPECT** and celebrate wild salmon and the benefits they bring to ecosystems, communities, and cultures.

Take the Pledge!

Scan this QR code with your phone or go to the web link and take the pledge to protect wild salmon. You'll be entered to win a copy of the book, *The Salmon Way: An Alaska State of Mind*.

SalmonState.org/thesalmonway



We Need Insects...

Without bees, butterflies, beetles, and flies, many Washington crops could not thrive.

- Raspberries** POLLINATED BY: mason bees, bumble bees and honey bees
- Onions** POLLINATED BY: honey bees and blue flies
- Blueberries** POLLINATED BY: bumble bees, mason bees, and leafcutter bees and honey bees
- Pears** POLLINATED BY: honey bees and mason bees
- Sweet Cherries** POLLINATED BY: honey bees
- Carrots** POLLINATED BY: sweat bees, wasps, hover flies, soldier flies and honey bees
- Alfalfa Hay** POLLINATED BY: grasshopper, bumble bees, cicadas, bumblebees and other bees
- Apples** POLLINATED BY: mason bees, bumble bees, sweat bees, mining bees and honey bees

...and Insects Need Us!

As many as half of all insect species are threatened with extinction worldwide. You can help the insects in our corner of the world explore the garden to find out how!

For more information on pollinators and how you can help, visit www.zoo.org/pollinators.

These examples are from Henry Vilas Zoo, the Seattle Aquarium and Woodland Park Zoo.



Next Steps

Based on the survey and feedback during site visits, the following recommendations will be undertaken.

1) Brainstorm with Partners at Fall Meeting:

- Conservation actions tied to multiple species, so it is easy to adapt calls to action to the animals Partners have;
- Develop seasonal campaigns with longer lead time, so folks can build into their planning (e.g., bat conservation or sustainable palm oil candy around Halloween);

2) Continue to gather examples from Partners:

- Conservation event templates and completed event samples with programs, activities, calls to action, etc. for others to adapt
- Social media examples on different topics
- If you have something to include, please email Marta.Burnet@zoo.org!

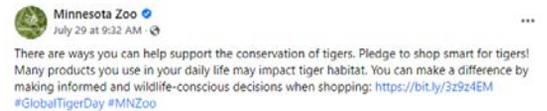
3) Develop and share resources on promising practices for conservation calls to action both in general and with effective empathy practices, in particular, for toolkit;

4) Host a learning group in late October about conservation calls to action to continue to build Members' skills in this area.

5) Work with our evaluation team (and potentially researchers) to continue to explore and identify ways to address the gap in research about empathy and conservation action, so we can try to measure the impact of calls to action.



INCLUDED WITH ZOO ADMISSION



Tastefully Simple with Sami and 143 others 13 Shares



410 33 Comments 77 Shares Like Comment Share



Pictures from Racine, Minnesota and Point Defiance Zoos, International Crane Foundation social media.



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