



October Committee Updates

Communications Committee

Chairs: Natalie Stier (Utah's Hogle Zoo) and Delanie Jellison (Santa Barbara Zoo)

Representatives: Natalie Stier (Utah's Hogle Zoo), Delanie Jellison (Santa Barbara Zoo), Brent Weston (Dakota Zoo), Leanne Schuh (Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center), Cher Vatalaro (Lehigh Valley Zoo), Liz Hines (Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium)

The committee continued to work on creating a system for folks in the Network to submit pieces to the Empathy Matters newsletter. They also discussed the role the committee will have in the 2026 Virtual Empathy Summit and what they will focus on in their session.

Conservation Action Committee

Chairs: Erica Carnes (Blank Park Zoo), Kelsey Raffel (Como Park Zoo & Conservatory)

Representatives: Bethanie West (Idaho Falls Zoo), Brooke Tucker (ZooMontana), Toby Seegert (Zoological Society of Milwaukee)

The committee discussed how their September coffee chat focused on empathy in community science programs went. In the discussion they focused on ways that the committee could expand on the conversation had in September, with a better emphasis on addressing the challenges, barriers, or unknowns that were mentioned in the event.

DEAI Committee

Chair: Crystal Fox (Lake Superior Zoo)

Representatives: Abigail Flores (Racine Zoo), Alejandra Medina (Minnesota Zoo), Sharon Spencer (Jacksonville Zoo & Gardens), Julie Pickard (Zoological Society of Milwaukee), Kirinne Slaughter (Visitor Studies Association)

The committee continued to revise the resource they are working on that aims to identify the connections between DEAI and empathy initiatives.



October Committee Updates

Membership Committee

Chair: Heather Autumn Russell (Akron Zoo), Isabelle Bieser (Zoological Society of Milwaukee)

Representatives: Chris Berg (Shedd Aquarium), Heather Harelson Nutick (Oakland Zoo)

The committee reviewed Partner Organization Applications and brainstormed the creation of a "state of the Network" report that would be shared at the end of every calendar year.

Steering Committee

Chair: Shana Kent (Alaska SeaLife Center)

Representatives: Austin Reich (Zoo Boise), Courtney Cordova (Henry Vilas Zoo), Hannah Tilden (Woodland Park Zoo), Liz Gilles (Minnesota Zoo),

The committee began discussing elements of the strategic planning process that will kick off later this year, continued working through the creation of various processes for bylaw items, and created the criteria for a "meet the committee representatives" newsletter feature.

Strategic Learning Committee

Chair: Jessica Schellhorn (Blank Park Zoo)

Representatives: Cam Whitley (Western Washington University), Dani Ford (ZooMontana), Jennifer Gauble (Saint Louis Zoo)

The committee continued to prepare for their empathy for plants focused learning group that will be hosted in November.



September Committee Updates

Communications Committee

Chairs: Natalie Stier (Utah's Hogle Zoo) and Delanie Jellison (Santa Barbara Zoo)

Representatives: Natalie Stier (Utah's Hogle Zoo), Delanie Jellison (Santa Barbara Zoo), Brent Weston (Dakota Zoo), Leanne Schuh (Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center), Cher Vatalaro (Lehigh Valley Zoo), Liz Hines (Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium)

Communications Committee (OPEN, 4 seats remaining): The committee began the ideation process for creating a platform through which those in the Network could submit pieces for Empathy Matters newsletters.

Conservation Action Committee

Chairs: Erica Carnes (Blank Park Zoo), Kelsey Raffel (Como Park Zoo & Conservatory)

Representatives: Bethanie West (Idaho Falls Zoo), Brooke Tucker (ZooMontana), Toby Seegert (Zoological Society of Milwaukee)

Conservation Action Committee (~3 seats remaining): The committee finalized the plan for facilitating their coffee chat focused on community science in September and discussed how they wanted to spend the time in their open meeting in October.

DEAI Committee

Chair: Crystal Fox (Lake Superior Zoo)

Representatives: Abigail Flores (Racine Zoo), Alejandra Medina (Minnesota Zoo), Sharon Spencer (Jacksonville Zoo & Gardens), Julie Pickard (Zoological Society of Milwaukee), Kirinne Slaughter (Visitor Studies Association)

DEAI Committee (OPEN, ~4 seats remaining): The committee discussed the results from their survey they deployed AZA and next steps for the Empathy & DEAI intersectionality document.



September Committee Updates

Membership Committee

Chair: Heather Autumn Russell (Akron Zoo), Isabelle Bieser (Zoological Society of Milwaukee)

Representatives: Chris Berg (Shedd Aquarium), Heather Harelson Nutick (Oakland Zoo)

Membership Committee (OPEN, 8 seats remaining): The committee began brainstorming how they want to spend time facilitating a 60 minute session at the February Empathy Summit.

Steering Committee

Chair: Shana Kent (Alaska SeaLife Center)

Representatives: Austin Reich (Zoo Boise), Courtney Cordova (Henry Vilas Zoo), Hannah Tilden (Woodland Park Zoo), Liz Gilles (Minnesota Zoo),

Steering Committee (OPEN, ~4 seats remaining): The committee discussed takeaways from the AZA Conference and how they should allocate time in their 2-hour long planning meeting in October.

Strategic Learning Committee

Chair: Jessica Schellhorn (Blank Park Zoo)

Representatives: Cam Whitley (Western Washington University), Dani Ford (ZooMontana), Jennifer Gauble (Saint Louis Zoo)

Strategic Learning Committee (OPEN, 1 seat remaining): The committee discussed alternate roles in the Empathy Summit that were not moderating a keynote session and solidified roles for their learning group in November.



August Committee Updates

Communications Committee

Chairs: Natalie Stier (Utah's Hogle Zoo) and Delanie Jellison (Santa Barbara Zoo)

Representatives: Natalie Stier (Utah's Hogle Zoo), Delanie Jellison (Santa Barbara Zoo), Brent Weston (Dakota Zoo), Leanne Schuh (Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center), Cher Vatalaro (Lehigh Valley Zoo), Liz Hines (Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium)

The committee finalized the ACE for Wildlife Network Branding Guide and identified areas of committee interest for work in 2026.

Conservation Action Committee

Chairs: Erica Carnes (Blank Park Zoo), Kelsey Raffel (Como Park Zoo & Conservatory)

Representatives: Bethanie West (Idaho Falls Zoo), Brooke Tucker (ZooMontana), Toby Seegert (Zoological Society of Milwaukee)

The committee discussed topics for a conservation-focused session at the 2026 Empathy Summit and continued to plan a coffee chat they will be hosting in September.

DEAI Committee

Chair: Crystal Fox (Lake Superior Zoo)

Representatives: Abigail Flores (Racine Zoo), Alejandra Medina (Minnesota Zoo), Sharon Spencer (Jacksonville Zoo & Gardens), Julie Pickard (Zoological Society of Milwaukee), Kirinne Slaughter (Visitor Studies Association)

The committee began creating a survey that they will use to learn about the impacts that AZA's DEAI standard has had on individuals in the zoo and aquarium community.



August Committee Updates

Membership Committee

Chair: Heather Autumn Russell (Akron Zoo), Isabelle Bieser (Zoological Society of Milwaukee)

Representatives: Chris Berg (Shedd Aquarium), Heather Harelson Nutick (Oakland Zoo)

The group discussed potential nuances to Partner Organization requirements and began brainstorming ways they as a committee can be more forward facing in the Network come 2026.

Steering Committee

Chair: Shana Kent (Alaska SeaLife Center)

Representatives: Austin Reich (Zoo Boise), Courtney Cordova (Henry Vilas Zoo), Hannah Tilden (Woodland Park Zoo), Liz Gilles (Minnesota Zoo),

No meeting.

Strategic Learning Committee

Chair: Jessica Schellhorn (Blank Park Zoo)

Representatives: Cam Whitley (Western Washington University), Dani Ford (ZooMontana), Jennifer Gauble (Saint Louis Zoo)

The committee narrowed in on the structure for the learning group they will be hosting in November on fostering empathy for plants.



July Committee Updates

Communications Committee

Chairs: Natalie Stier (Utah's Hogle Zoo) and Delanie Jellison (Santa Barbara Zoo)

Representatives: Natalie Stier (Utah's Hogle Zoo), Delanie Jellison (Santa Barbara Zoo), Brent Weston (Dakota Zoo), Leanne Schuh (Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center), Cher Vatalaro (Lehigh Valley Zoo), Liz Hines (Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium)

In July the committee continued to revise the ACE for Wildlife Network branding and style guide that can be used by anyone in the Network when creating empathy or Network related materials.

Conservation Action Committee

Chairs: Erica Carnes (Blank Park Zoo), Kelsey Raffel (Como Park Zoo & Conservatory)

Representatives: Bethanie West (Idaho Falls Zoo), Brooke Tucker (ZooMontana), Toby Seegert (Zoological Society of Milwaukee)

The committee created the outline for their Empathy in Conservation - Community Science coffee chat that they will be hosting in late September.

DEAI Committee

Chair: Crystal Fox (Lake Superior Zoo)

Representatives: Abigail Flores (Racine Zoo), Alejandra Medina (Minnesota Zoo), Sharon Spencer (Jacksonville Zoo & Gardens), Julie Pickard (Zoological Society of Milwaukee), Kirinne Slaughter (Visitor Studies Association)

The committee continued to edit the empathy & DEAI document that they are working on, and Abby Flores chatted with the committee about the coffee chat she will be hosting in September focused on bridging resistance.



ADVANCING CONSERVATION THROUGH
EMPATHY FOR WILDLIFE

July Committee Updates

Membership Committee

Chair: Heather Autumn Russell (Akron Zoo), Isabelle Bieser (Zoological Society of Milwaukee)

Representatives: Chris Berg (Shedd Aquarium), Heather Harelson Nutick (Oakland Zoo)

No July meeting

Steering Committee

Chair: Shana Kent (Alaska SeaLife Center)

Representatives: Aszya Summers (Lincoln Park Zoo), Austin Reich (Zoo Boise), Courtney Cordova (Henry Vilas Zoo), Hannah Tilden (Woodland Park Zoo), Liz Gilles (Minnesota Zoo),

The committee continued to outline various processes that are outlined in the Network's bylaws. This procedural document is to be used by the committees and Advancing Empathy Team at Woodland Park Zoo to ensure that the Network remains compliant with the bylaws.

Strategic Learning Committee

Chair: Jessica Schellhorn (Blank Park Zoo)

Representatives: Cam Whitley (Western Washington University), Dani Ford (ZooMontana), Kelly McAdams (Clearwater Marine Aquarium), Jennifer Gauble (Saint Louis Zoo), Monica Digre (Como Park Zoo & Aquarium)

The committee created an outline for an empathy for plants learning group they will be hosting in November.



ADVANCING CONSERVATION THROUGH
EMPATHY FOR WILDLIFE

June Committee Updates

Communications Committee

Chairs: Natalie Stier (Utah's Hogle Zoo) and Delanie Jellison (Santa Barbara Zoo)

Representatives: Natalie Stier (Utah's Hogle Zoo), Delanie Jellison (Santa Barbara Zoo), Brent Weston (Dakota Zoo), Leanne Schuh (Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center), Cher Vatalaro (Lehigh Valley Zoo), Liz Hines (Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium)

No June Meeting.

Conservation Action Committee

Chairs: Erica Carnes (Blank Park Zoo), Kelsey Raffel (Como Park Zoo & Conservatory)

Representatives: Bethanie West (Idaho Falls Zoo), Brooke Tucker (ZooMontana), Toby Seegert (Zoological Society of Milwaukee)

The committee held a committee coffee chat where we shared the conservation initiatives our organizations are working on. We also brainstormed ways the CAC could support other Network organizations in their conservation efforts. Ideas included providing a framework for projects or partnerships, and hosting targeted Network learning groups for organizations already engaged in this work or those looking to get started. See our agenda [here](#).

DEAI Committee

Chair: Crystal Fox (Lake Superior Zoo)

Representatives: Abigail Flores (Racine Zoo), Alejandra Medina (Minnesota Zoo), Sharon Spencer (Jacksonville Zoo & Gardens), Julie Pickard (Zoological Society of Milwaukee), Kirinne Slaughter (Visitor Studies Association)

No June meeting.



ADVANCING CONSERVATION THROUGH
EMPATHY FOR WILDLIFE

June Committee Updates

Membership Committee

Chair: Heather Autumn Russell (Akron Zoo), Isabelle Bieser (Zoological Society of Milwaukee)

Representatives: Chris Berg (Shedd Aquarium), Heather Harelson Nutick (Oakland Zoo)

The committee identified goals for the Network's exhibit hall booth and welcome session at AZA this year and began determining which types of resource we want to showcase at our booth to intentionally welcome new Members and Affiliates.

Steering Committee

Chair: Shana Kent (Alaska SeaLife Center)

Representatives: Aszya Summers (Lincoln Park Zoo), Austin Reich (Zoo Boise), Courtney Cordova (Henry Vilas Zoo), Hannah Tilden (Woodland Park Zoo), Liz Gilles (Minnesota Zoo),

The committee began creating formal, written processes for various pieces of our bylaws. The processes identified will live in an accompanying document to our Network's bylaws and help committees and the Advancing Empathy team carry out processes necessary to sustain the Network as it expands. View our agenda [here](#).

Strategic Learning Committee

Chair: Jessica Schellhorn (Blank Park Zoo)

Representatives: Cam Whitley (Western Washington University), Dani Ford (ZooMontana), Kelly McAdams (Clearwater Marine Aquarium), Jennifer Gauble (Saint Louis Zoo), Monica Digre (Como Park Zoo & Aquarium)

No June meeting.



ADVANCING CONSERVATION THROUGH
EMPATHY FOR WILDLIFE

May Committee Updates

Communications Committee

Chairs: Natalie Stier (Utah's Hogle Zoo) and Delanie Jellison (Santa Barbara Zoo)

Representatives: Natalie Stier (Utah's Hogle Zoo), Delanie Jellison (Santa Barbara Zoo), Brent Weston (Dakota Zoo), Leanne Schuh (Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center), Cher Vatalaro (Lehigh Valley Zoo), Liz Hines (Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium)

The committee discussed the first steps for creating an ACE for Wildlife Network branding style guide to help Network Members and Affiliates in their communications about the Network. View our agenda [here](#).

Conservation Action Committee

Chairs: Erica Carnes (Blank Park Zoo), Kelsey Raffel (Como Park Zoo & Conservatory)

Representatives: Bethanie West (Idaho Falls Zoo), Brooke Tucker (ZooMontana), Toby Seegert (Zoological Society of Milwaukee)

No May meeting

DEAI Committee

Chair: Crystal Fox (Lake Superior Zoo)

Representatives: Abigail Flores (Racine Zoo), Alejandra Medina (Minnesota Zoo), Sharon Spencer (Jacksonville Zoo & Gardens), Julie Pickard (Zoological Society of Milwaukee), Kirinne Slaughter (Visitor Studies Association)

The committee identified three goals for a document that will focus on highlighting the intersection of empathy work and DEAI initiatives. [View our agenda here](#).



ADVANCING CONSERVATION THROUGH
EMPATHY FOR WILDLIFE

May Committee Updates

Membership Committee

Chair: Heather Autumn Russell (Akron Zoo), Isabelle Bieser (Zoological Society of Milwaukee)

Representatives: Chris Berg (Shedd Aquarium), Heather Harelson Nutick (Oakland Zoo)

The committee discussed changes to the Network Partner application to align with the expansion plan outlined in the new draft bylaws. [View our agenda here.](#)

Steering Committee

Chair: Shana Kent (Alaska SeaLife Center)

Representatives: Aszya Summers (Lincoln Park Zoo), Austin Reich (Zoo Boise), Courtney Cordova (Henry Vilas Zoo), Hannah Tilden (Woodland Park Zoo), Liz Gilles (Minnesota Zoo),

The committee elected Shana Kent and Liz Gilles to serve as co-chairs until all-committee chair elections later this year. The committee also prioritized their upcoming work for the next year and will work to set a date for a long-term committee planning meeting later this year. You can see their agenda [here](#).

Strategic Learning Committee

Chair: Jessica Schellhorn (Blank Park Zoo)

Representatives: Cam Whitley (Western Washington University), Dani Ford (ZooMontana), Kelly McAdams (Clearwater Marine Aquarium), Jennifer Gauble (Saint Louis Zoo), Monica Digre (Como Park Zoo & Aquarium)

The committee began identifying goals for a learning group they are hosting in November around fostering empathy for plants. [View our agenda here.](#)