

Contact:
Zach Nugent
Communication and Media Relations Specialist
o. 952.431.9534 // m. 952.250.7293
zach.nugent@state.mn.us



NEWS RELEASE

MINNESOTA ZOO ANNOUNCES STAFF REDUCTIONS

Apple Valley, MN – May 8, 2020 – For nearly 42 years, the Minnesota Zoo has been a resource for all Minnesotans – providing a window of inspiration into the natural world. During this time, the Zoo has celebrated successes and overcome challenges. However, the current situation created by a global pandemic is unlike any challenge the Zoo has experienced.

On March 14, the Zoo closed to the public and proactively cancelled or postponed a number of programs and events. In the weeks since, it has become evident that this is a prolonged situation that will require a long-term recovery plan.

As a state agency, the Zoo relies on earned and contributed income for 2/3 of its operating expenses. A number of measures have been taken to reduce costs in areas that do not affect the health and safety of staff and animals. These include, among others, cancelling or delaying major projects and freezing hiring and spending. Unfortunately, these reductions are not enough to sustain the Zoo in the current environment.

At this time, staff reductions have become necessary. Staff at the Minnesota Zoo and Minnesota Zoo Foundation are champions of animals, conservation and education and have helped build the Zoo into a beloved destination. This decision was not made lightly and the next several months will be exceptionally challenging. In all, 125 Zoo positions will be impacted. This includes 48 employee layoffs, keeping vacant positions open, and suspending seasonal hiring. Additionally, four employees have been laid off from the Zoo Foundation. Affected employees have been notified this week.

“This is a difficult week. These employees are talented individuals who have served our Zoo and worked tirelessly to provide world-class animal care, create unique nature education programming, build strong relationships with zoo supporters, and welcome millions of guests to a Zoo that makes Minnesotans proud,” said Minnesota Zoo Director and Foundation President John Frawley. “This reduction is not a reflection of the work performed by our staff, this is an unfortunate result of the current pandemic. I am grateful for the service of all Zoo and Foundation employees – and for their commitment to compassionately serving animals and people in Minnesota and beyond.”

For the last two months since the Zoo closed, staff have remained hard at work providing care to our animals and facilities, developing virtual educational programming and raising funds to support the Zoo. As we move forward, animals will continue to receive exceptional care and the Zoo will make additional resources available for families and educators across the state.

“Support has poured in from across Minnesota in letters and social media posts and we are grateful to those who have shared kind words and contributed financially to the Zoo. Our goal is straightforward. We must care for the animals and land entrusted to us and keep the Zoo sustainable until we can reopen in the future,” Frawley said. “We are grateful for the support we have received from the State, including Governor Walz’s recommendation of a special appropriation of \$6 million, which is carefully being considered by the legislature.”

The Zoo is evaluating options for reopening, although it is recognized the experience will be different. All reopening decisions will be made with safety in mind – the safety of staff, animals, and the community as a whole – and in close coordination with the State and public health agencies.

The Minnesota Zoo is a year-round destination located in Apple Valley, just minutes south of Mall of America. The Zoo’s mission is to connect people, animals and the natural world to save wildlife. For more information, call 952.431.9500 or visit mnzoo.org. The Minnesota Zoo is an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and an institutional member of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA).

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