

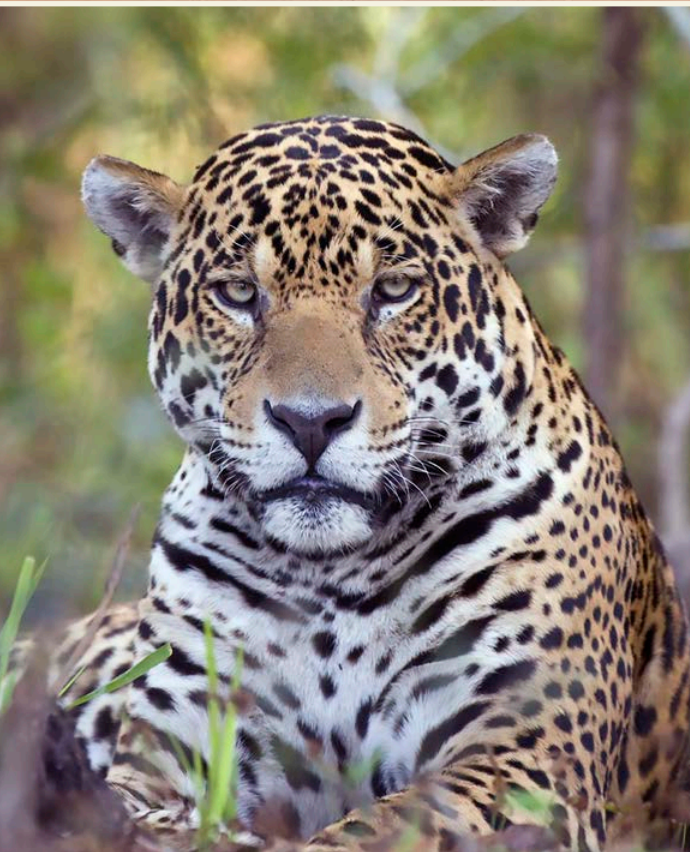
2025 – 2027  
CONSERVATION  
STRATEGIC PLAN



CONSERVATION  
SOCIETY OF  
CALIFORNIA  
TAKING ACTION FOR WILDLIFE

OAKLAND ZOO





## INTRODUCTION

Oakland Zoo celebrates the impossibly beautiful planet we all share. From delicate ecosystems to astounding wildlife, our respect and awe is reflected in everything we do on-site and around the world.

With the Earth's wild places in peril, now is the time to turn that awe into action. We must utilize the breadth of our wisdom, skills, resources and heart for the future of our home.

As an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), the Zoo is part of the largest conservation alliance in the nation. Zoos are in a wonderfully unique position to play a leadership role in this mission. Specially trained staff can employ their skills to save wildlife. As a trusted source of information and connection for millions of people, zoos have an extraordinary influence on how society perceives, connects to, and learns about the natural world. And zoos provide the leadership and inspiration for communities to act as champions for the natural world.

Oakland Zoo has a long history of centering conservation within our mission. In 1986, our team met Dr. Cynthia Moss, a renowned elephant conservationist and founder of Amboseli Trust for Elephants. Moved by the plight of these iconic species, it became clear Oakland Zoo must weave saving wild elephants into our work, and we began using our resources to educate the public, end the ivory trade, and fuel conservation efforts in

Kenya. Our subsequent conservation efforts have built on this momentum.

We have been building our commitment to wildlife, habitats, and people, and diving deeper into the needs of the planet with more urgency, resources, and joy every year. This expanding ethos is reflected in our new mission and vision, and this first ever Oakland Zoo Conservation Strategic Plan.

We can't do this work alone. Partnering with innovative organizations and communities locally and around the globe, this plan will further guide us to conserve habitats and wildlife, promote human-wildlife coexistence, and combat the wildlife trade. Taking Action for Wildlife is who we are, the community we are building, and our hope for the future of all species.

**With optimistic ambition of what we can achieve together,**

**Amy Gotliffe**

Vice President of Conservation

**Nik Dehejia**

Chief Executive Officer

---

*In fall 2023, Oakland Zoo completed its first institution-wide strategic planning process with input from thousands of community stakeholders, both local and global. With that Strategic Plan framework in place, leaders of conservation initiatives within the Zoo then gathered to develop this focused Conservation Strategic Plan to bring new direction and structure to the teams working directly on wildlife conservation efforts.*





**VISION**

*The desired future reality towards which we strive*  
A flourishing planet where people and wildlife thrive together

**MISSION**

*Our unique contribution to help bring our vision to life*  
Oakland Zoo deepens connection with animals, saves wildlife, and inspires champions for the natural world



“

How wonderful to be here in a zoo that is doing so much to protect and restore the natural world. Animals are being rescued from the very brink of extinction and are being given a second chance.

– JANE GOODALL

# OUR APPROACH

Oakland Zoo believes that collaboration, creativity, and trust with partners is the key to making an impact in our connected world. The shift from “we have all the solutions” to “let’s combine our strengths for collective good” has been a critical re-framing in the field of conservation that allows global efforts to meet the needs of people, wildlife, and ecosystems. We cannot achieve change without an integrated network of allies: wildlife researchers, veterinarians, conservationists, educators, government agencies, universities, our partners worldwide and our guests locally.

“

It is only through alliances and partnerships that conservation becomes relevant to the needs of society.

– NELSON MANDELA



## WE AIM TO BUILD:

### Collaborative, long-term partnerships and engagement

- We develop deep relationships built on trust by investing time and resources
- We create, lead, and join alliances to achieve greater results than we can accomplish on our own, whether through additive expertise, messaging, or new audiences

### Layers of impact and opportunity

- We leverage unique expertise from Zoo staff (including husbandry, research, facilities planning, education, and curriculum development) to drive action
- We create a strong foundation to allow new initiatives and their impact to grow over time, bringing this work to our wide audience, including one million visitors annually

### A bridge between conservation programs, guests, and local communities

- We leverage our field experience at the Zoo, translating it into messaging, storytelling, and engagement
- We inspire local communities and guests to take globally impactful actions
- We engage Zoo staff and volunteers to embody our mission daily



With a track record of conservation work and success starting in the 1980s, we know that conservation is both a science and a practice that requires shared values, including:

- Deep listening and empathy to understand conservation complexities
- Collaborative co-design that drives action and supports connection to animals, people, and their shared landscape
- Research-driven best practices and measurable solutions
- Creativity and risk-taking
- Continuous evolution and iteration
- Positivity and optimism

These principles will guide our activities and projects as outlined below in our Theory of Change, the three pillars of our conservation work, and the species and geographies where we will concentrate our efforts.

At Oakland Zoo, we take a dynamic and holistic approach to conservation. We pride ourselves on:

- A green, inspirational and peaceful setting to experience connection with wildlife
- A sustainable campus that leads by example
- A culture of conservation that extends to all staff and volunteers
- Messaging and programs that inspire empathy and action for wildlife
- *Veterinary care and animal welfare programs for injured, sick or displaced wildlife*
- *Conservation initiatives on-site and nationally that rescue, vaccinate, and breed animals for release*
- *Global conservation initiatives, partnerships and alliances*

This Conservation Strategic Plan focuses on the latter three strategies, those that work with animals most directly.






# OAKLAND ZOO'S THEORY OF CHANGE

The Zoo’s programs, projects and partnerships aim to create a virtuous cycle to bring about change. The graphic below sums up our activities to achieve short term impact (in the next one to five years), which will pave the way for long-term impact (six or more years), and ultimately lead us to our vision.

Our institutional Strategic Plan focuses on three areas: People, Animals, and Planet. Through People, we seek to create an activated and empowered network of individuals, from guests to local school children. Through Animals, we ensure that all animals in our care are healthy and thriving. Through Planet, we seek to save wildlife through our own initiatives, strong conservation alliances, and the support of our partners in the field. Actions across these three categories of work inform and strengthen the others.

Our Conservation Strategic Plan integrates elements from People, Animals, and Planet to focus on saving species and ecosystems by harnessing the power of communities.

THEORY OF CHANGE – CAUSAL CHAIN			
	 PEOPLE	 ANIMALS	 PLANET
Activities	<b>Empower and inspire champions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>On-Site:</b> Provide inspiring, engaging, and memorable experiences and programs about animals, climate change, and nature</li><li>• <b>Off-Site:</b> Collaborate with local schools and communities to inspire action</li></ul>	<b>Provide and promote high-quality animal care</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pioneer and implement new standards of animal care, sanctuary, rehabilitation, and rescue practices that improve animals’ physical and psychological well-being</li></ul>	<b>Conserve wildlife and the natural environment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide care, release, and rewilding for animals rescued</li><li>• Save wildlife through initiatives and amplify the work of conservation partners</li></ul>
Short-term Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Through engaging, inspiring learning experiences, people feel greater connection to nature and feel empowered to take action to preserve the natural world</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Animal residents of the Zoo are healthy and thriving</li><li>• Sanctuaries, rescues, and AZA accredited Zoos follow the lead of the Zoo, improving standards of care year-over-year</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Endangered species survive natural disasters and epidemics and experience less human-wildlife conflict</li><li>• Species conservation initiatives have increased support to engage in impactful conservation work</li></ul>
Long-term Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Communities assume their role as environmental stewards</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Animals under human care live whole, enriching lives</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Habitats thrive in a biodiverse world</b></li></ul>



# OUR GOALS

Our three-year goals to support wildlife conservation are aligned with our broader Strategic Plan, guiding work at both the individual species and program levels.



## PILLARS OF OUR CONSERVATION WORK

The three pillars below reflect the impact the Zoo can achieve through activities such as leading alliances, providing veterinary expertise, or capacity building for our network of partners.

SPECIES + HABITAT PROTECTION	WILDLIFE TRADE MITIGATION	HUMAN-WILDLIFE COEXISTENCE
We protect, maintain and restore natural ecosystems and wildlife to enhance biodiversity and prevent loss of species.	We prevent and reduce the unsustainable and inhumane trade of wild animals to ensure a future for species and ecosystems.	We partner with communities on leadership, connection, and behaviors that allow for people and wildlife to thrive in a shared habitat.



## SPECIES AND HABITAT PROTECTION

- Engage in habitat connectivity initiatives in California that support our priority native species.
- Expand our California native animal species recovery programs to ensure sustainable populations.
- Deepen the Zoo’s commitment to conservation partners engaged in species protection locally and globally through strategies such as alliance building, deploying staff expertise, capacity building, and funding.
- Invest in habitat restoration work to create viable ecosystems in Oakland’s Knowland Park and beyond through conservation partner programs.
- Participate in legislative efforts to protect wildlife and wild places to create long-term safeguards.



## WILDLIFE TRADE MITIGATION

- Decrease public demand in the Bay Area and beyond for inappropriate animal ownership and exploitation through leading behavior change initiatives.
- Extract items made from animal parts from the wildlife trade economy to reduce the scale of animal-related commerce, and leverage items for research and training.
- Deepen the Zoo's commitment to conservation partners working to end wildlife trade through strategies such as capacity building, deploying staff expertise, and funding.
- Build stronger global economies in fragile ecosystems to prevent or curb wildlife trade as a source of income.
- Lead the Northern California hub of the public-private Wildlife Confiscation Network to help individual animals who are victims of wildlife trade.
- Participate in legislative actions that prevent or decrease wildlife trade at the systemic level.



## HUMAN-WILDLIFE COEXISTENCE

- Develop a regional hub for coexistence in Northern California to conserve species in conflict with communities:
  - Codify expertise and training on topics such as community engagement, right livelihoods, conflict mitigation, and more.
  - Serve as a trusted source for the public of coexistence tools and actions they can take
  - Build alliances within the conservation field and connect conservation leaders to share, replicate, and scale successful models.
  - Build Zoo staff capacity and training to engage in coexistence work for relevant focus species.
- Deepen commitment to partners working on coexistence in California and worldwide as a sustainable long-term solution for species conservation.
- Invest in Oakland Zoo's campus in Knowland Park as a model for demonstrating coexistence with native wildlife (such as deer, turkeys, coyotes) along urban centers and edges.



# SPECIES & GEOGRAPHIES

**Oakland Zoo is home to more than 100 animal species, and has supported conservation efforts for dozens of species over the years. Thousands of species worldwide are currently declining and require human action to reverse the threats against them. There is no shortage of need or opportunity to engage in conservation, and we know our work is urgent and impactful. Setting a clear scope will allow us to marshal resources and energy effectively.**

With this plan, we will focus our efforts on ten key species that the Zoo is particularly well positioned to support in the wild. These species allow us to use expertise in animal care and veterinary practices, lean into alliances we can serve as a hub for, encourage our communities to take action, and align with our conservation pillars to amplify impact.



“

Each year, AZA-accredited members, like Oakland Zoo, put nearly \$300 million to work supporting wildlife conservation field work. Their work and dedication is saving animals from extinction.

– DAN ASHE

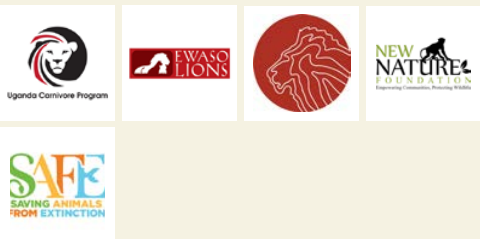
PRESIDENT & CEO – ASSOCIATION OF ZOOS & AQUARIUMS





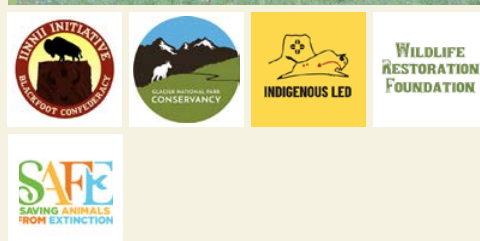
## AFRICAN LION

The iconic African lion symbolizes the beauty and majesty of the animal kingdom, but lions are in serious trouble. The worldwide lion population has plummeted by 43% over the last 20 years. Conflict between wildlife and humans over shared habitat and resources contributes to the decline. Oakland Zoo believes the success of lion conservation hinges on the involvement and leadership of people who live among these predators. Focusing on Uganda and Kenya, Oakland Zoo supports community-based conservation and co-existence projects. A new lion-focused community alliance in Queen Elizabeth Park, Uganda, co-created with New Nature Foundation and local communities, includes initiatives like fuel efficient stoves, eco-competitions, and a first-ever Community Nature Center that will promote connection and a mutually beneficial co-existence.



## AMERICAN BISON

North America's largest land mammals play an important role in the prairie ecosystem, as well the history and culture of Native Americans, including the Blackfeet people. Nearly driven to extinction in the 1880s, the bison population has grown to about 450,000 through conservation efforts, but fewer than 20,000 of these animals range freely. Oakland Zoo has joined forces with several conservation organizations, including Indigenous Led and Glacier National Park, to restore heritage bison to the landscape of the Blackfoot Confederacy. Through the Zoo's outbreeding and release program, calves born at the zoo are released in Montana and roam freely on Blackfoot Territory, leading to a resurgence of bison where they have been absent for a century.



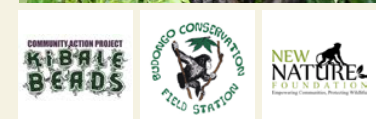
## BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERON

The dramatic-looking black-crowned night herons are longtime residents of Oakland and were named the official bird of Oakland in 2019. Unfortunately, their urban home presents challenges: their rookeries are surrounded by buildings and cars, and young herons are often injured in this environment. Oakland Zoo leads an alliance to work with Oakland communities and conservation partners to move towards coexistence. The Oakland Zoo Heron Response Team patrols the rookeries near Lake Merritt to quickly aid injured birds, working with International Bird Rescue and others to rehabilitate and release them.



## CHIMPANZEE

Uganda is home to some 5,000 endangered chimpanzees, with much of the population living in the Budongo Forest Reserve and Kibale National Park, hence the Zoo's focus on these regions. Human-wildlife conflict and loss of habitat are the main challenges, so the Zoo has partnered with the most inventive programs addressing these areas. The Zoo is the sole supporter of the Budongo Snare Removal Project, which employs six Eco-Guards to remove snares from the forest and monitor chimpanzee populations. Community education, veterinary care for injured chimps, and alternative sustenance and financial programs for ex-poachers rounds out this holistic approach. The Zoo also partners with New Nature Foundation's science centers, eco-fuel, and community engagement programs in Uganda. Our Beads for Chimps program sells beautiful jewelry and crafts made by a woman's artisan collective, ensuring women living near wild chimp habitats earn a sustainable livelihood.

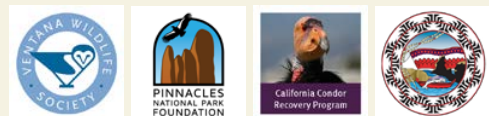






## CALIFORNIA CONDOR

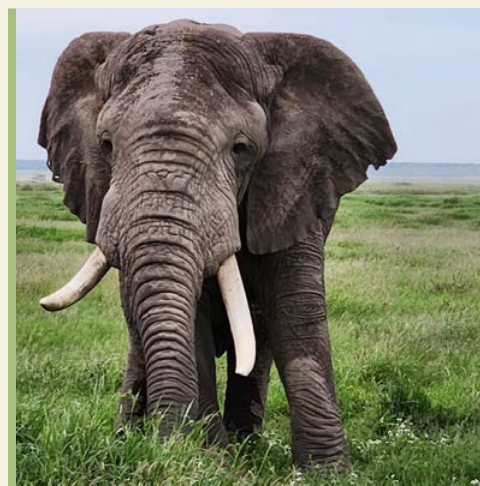
The California condor is an icon of the West, with a critical position in our ecosystem. These extraordinary birds were driven to near extinction in 1982; thanks to intensive conservation efforts, condors exist today in growing numbers. However, condors still face serious threats from lead poisoning (from lead shot in the carrion they eat), ingested micro trash, loss of habitat, Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) and wildfires exacerbated by climate change. Since 2013, the Zoo has been a member of the California Condor Recovery Program. The Zoo's Steve and Jackie Kane Recovery Center offers essential veterinary treatment for sick or injured condors, and supports the condor breeding program by temporarily housing juveniles. Oakland Zoo



is committed to ensuring that California condors never come close to extinction again.

## AFRICAN ELEPHANT

African elephants have inspired humans for eons with their grand size, intelligence, and matriarchal societies. Today, our largest land mammal faces extinction due to loss of habitat, human-wildlife conflict, and the most significant threat: poaching. Oakland Zoo envisions a future where elephants coexist with local communities without fear of poaching. We support organizations that invest in long-term research and deploy innovative community-based initiatives in Kenya. The Zoo works in elephant advocacy, leading efforts to end elephant acts in circuses and closing loopholes in the ivory trade. Toss the Tusk events educate the public and offer a place to turn in ivory products, driving down demand. And our extensive work in elephant welfare and protected contact promotes conservation and welfare of elephants worldwide.



## JAGUAR

The Central American rainforests are home to iconic species including the jaguar. Like many rainforest animals, jaguars are affected by habitat loss and climate change, but are also threatened by the illegal wildlife trade, which kills many animals in transit and devastates ecosystems. To combat poaching, the Zoo partners with ARCAS, which rehabilitates and releases animals caught in the illegal wildlife trade in Guatemala. Oakland Zoo collaborates on a state-of-the-art interpretive center, provides critical veterinary assistance on-site, and shares expertise. The Zoo is committed to combating the unsustainable wildlife trade, both legal and illegal, with a public awareness campaign to ensure our

community is part of the solution: #EndTheTrade, which includes an interactive exhibit inspiring public action. The Zoo has also joined forces with AZA's Wildlife Confiscations Network to help rescue individual animals who are victims of the trade.

## CALIFORNIA MOUNTAIN LION

Mountain lions usually keep to themselves, but in our crowded Bay Area, humans and mountain lions can come into conflict. Oakland Zoo has made a bold commitment to the conservation of our own California native cat, which has an important role in our ecosystem. In 2013, we launched the Bay Area Cougar Action Team (BACAT), an alliance of organizations focused on this goal. The Zoo helped pass measures that support the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and address human-mountain lion conflict. The Zoo has rescued and treated over 25 injured or orphaned mountain lions over the last decade. Our resident mountain lions were rescued as orphaned cubs and inspire guests to learn about coexistence.







## GRAY WOLF

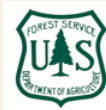
Wolves were eradicated in California by humans almost a century ago, but now they are naturally migrating back into their historic range. Much of their habitat is also home to ranching communities. In order for wolves to thrive, these charismatic and ecologically crucial animals need wild corridors and coexistence strategies to reduce wolf-livestock conflict. Oakland Zoo partners with Working Circle, a nonprofit organization that unites the values of rural and urban communities around sustainable ranching and large predator conservation. Their Range Stewards, funded primarily by the Zoo, work directly with ranchers to reduce vulnerability in cattle and prevent predation. Further alliances and initiatives



are being built as Oakland Zoo expands our work for wolves.


## NATIVE YELLOW-LEGGED FROG

The native yellow-legged frog was once one of the most numerous animals in the alpine habitats of the Sierra Nevada mountains. It is now on the verge of extinction, with a 90 percent population decline due to the decimating effects of the chytrid fungus, a global pandemic that has been called the greatest loss of biodiversity ever caused by a pathogen. Oakland Zoo works with researchers at the University of California, US Forest Service, National Park Service, and zoos across California to inoculate frogs against the fungus. Frogs who have received inoculations are then released back to the wild and monitored by wildlife biologists. Oakland Zoo is furthering efforts to save this species through genetic rescue (also known as biobanking frog genetics to preserve diverse sets of DNA) and developing methods for propagating the species for release.






# OAKLAND ZOO CONSERVATION MILESTONES




Established the Zoo's first conservation partnership with Amboseli Trust for Elephants in Kenya

1985




Launched partnership with Budongo Snare Removal Project, protecting chimps in Uganda

1999




Began partnership with ARCAS in Guatemala, saving wildlife from trafficking

2000




Started Action Eco Trips Program to bring visibility to conservation projects

2003




Launched Quarters for Conservation, investing a portion of each admissions ticket in conservation

2012




Launched Beads for Chimps program, supporting woman artisans living in Uganda

2013




Established agreement with CA Department of Fish and Wildlife to rescue local Mountain lions in need

2013




Began CA Condor Rescues

2014




Opened amphibian crisis labs to protect native frogs

2014




Helped pass AB 96 to close the enforcement loophole in California's elephant ivory sales ban and prohibit rhinoceros horn trade

2015




Facilitated the historic move of heritage Bison to Blackfeet Nation territory

2016




Launched Riparian Brush Rabbit vaccination program to save the species from hemorrhagic virus

2020




Opened the Inside the Illegal Wildlife Trade exhibit and launched accompanying campaign

2021



Blackfeet Tribe releases bison into Glacier National Park

2023



Joined the Wildlife Confiscation Network

2024

# LONG-TERM PARTNERS IN CONSERVATION



IN ADDITION TO OUR FOCUS ON INDIVIDUAL SPECIES, WE WILL ALSO CONCENTRATE OUR EFFORTS IN THESE KEY LOCATIONS. WE HAVE A CRITICAL MASS OF LONG-TERM PARTNERS AND PROJECTS IN THESE GEOGRAPHIES, WHICH MAGNIFIES THE IMPACT OF THE WORK.

[Amboseli Trust for Elephants](#)

[Animals Asia](#)

[ARCAS Wildlife Rescue](#)

[Bay Area Puma Project](#)

[Bear League](#)

[Big Life](#)

[Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre](#)

[Budongo Snare Removal Project](#)

[Centre ValBio](#)

[Ewaso Lions](#)

[Glacier National Park](#)

[Golden Gate Bird Alliance](#)

[Indigenous Led](#)

[International Bird Rescue](#)

[Kaminando Jaguar Project](#)

[Kibale Bead/Community Action Project](#)

[Lion Recovery Fund](#)

[Lubee Bat Conservancy](#)

[New Nature Foundation](#)

[Pinnacles National Park](#)

[Proyecto Titi – Cotton Top Tamarin Project](#)

[Queen Elizabeth Park Lion Alliance](#)

[Reticulated Giraffe Project](#)

[Somali Giraffe Project](#)

[Uganda Carnivore Program](#)

[Ventana Wildlife Society](#)

[Wild Welfare](#)

[Working Circle Wolf Program](#)





[WWW.OAKLANDZOO.ORG/TAKINGACTION](http://WWW.OAKLANDZOO.ORG/TAKINGACTION)

9777 Golf Links Road Oakland, CA 94605  
OAKLANDZOO.ORG