



MINNESOTA ZOOLOGICAL BOARD & MINNESOTA ZOO

FY2026 Annual Report to the Legislature

Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2026

Submitted September 14, 2026

Submitted pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, section 85A.02, subdivision 12.

Message from the Zoo Board Chair & Zoo Director

We are pleased to present the Minnesota Zoological Board and Minnesota Zoo's FY2026 Annual Report to the Legislature. This report highlights the work of the Minnesota Zoological Board and the Minnesota Zoo during the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026.

For nearly 50 years, the Minnesota Zoo has served Minnesotans through its unique combination of wildlife conservation, animal care, education, and public engagement. In FY2026, the Zoo welcomed nearly 1.36 million visitors, provided educational program experiences to 148,970 participants, and delivered 113,890 free admissions through the Free to Explore program. The Zoo also continued its leadership in conservation through its award-winning conservation programs and participation in 15 Association of Zoos and Aquariums Saving Animals From Extinction (SAFE) programs.

The Minnesota Zoological Board continued its responsibility to provide oversight, strategic direction, and stewardship of the Zoo. During FY2026, the Board approved the Zoo's FY27 budget, reviewed quarterly and audited financial statements, strengthened Board governance and committee structures, and supported the Zoo's conservation, education, capital, and operational priorities.

We are grateful to the Minnesota Legislature and the State of Minnesota for their continued partnership and investment in the Minnesota Zoo. Support provided during the 2026 legislative session will help the Zoo sustain operations and continue delivering public value to communities across Minnesota.

As the Zoo looks toward its 50th anniversary in 2028, we remain focused on responsible stewardship of public resources, strong governance, conservation impact, and ensuring that the Minnesota Zoo continues to serve as a statewide resource for people, animals, and the natural world.

We thank the Zoo's employees, volunteers, Board members, partners, donors, and the people of Minnesota for their continued commitment to the Minnesota Zoo and its mission.

Rebecca Crooks-Stratton

Chair, Minnesota Zoological Board

John Frawley

Director, Minnesota Zoo

Minnesota Zoo Mission

To connect people, animals, and the natural world to save wildlife.

FY2026 at a Glance

1.36 million	visitors served
148,970	education program participants
113,890	Free to Explore admissions provided
5,000	animals cared for
485 acres	campus with 125 buildings and related facilities
\$320 million	annual economic impact
15	AZA Saving Animals From Extinction (SAFE) programs
4	major capital projects underway

2026 State Investment & Legislative Partnership

- \$3.8 million in one-time General Fund operating support
- \$9 million for capital asset preservation improvements
- \$952,000 in Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund support for conservation work, including bison recovery and at-risk butterfly conservation

Funding amounts above reflect enacted appropriations from the 2026 legislative session.

FY2026 Minnesota Zoological Board Activities

The Minnesota Zoological Board provides governance, oversight, and strategic direction for the Minnesota Zoo. During FY2026, the Board focused on financial stewardship, governance, mission impact, and long-term planning.

Governance & Oversight

- Approved the FY27 Zoo budget
- Approved FY26 spending authority of \$42.7 million
- Approved the FY25 audited financial statements
- Reviewed and approved FY26 quarterly financial statements
- Approved revisions to the Zoo Board Bylaws
- Approved the Zoo Board member position description
- Approved revisions to committee charters for the Finance, Legislative Affairs, Governance, and Conservation Committees

Board Membership & Structure

- 24 of 30 Board seats were filled during FY26: 14 Governor-appointed members and 10 Board-appointed members
- Two Board officers served during FY26: Grace Chou, Chair, and Rebecca Crooks-Stratton, Vice Chair
- Two Governor reappointments: Beth Forsythe and Gabe Acosta-Reyes

- Two Governor new appointments: Kathi Micheletti and Emily Nachtigal
- Six Board reappointments: Braden Prickett, Jana Johnson, Maureen Scallon Failor, Dan Wolter, Rahul Koranne, and Tim Mulcahy
- One Board new appointment: Blake Grams
- Three FY27 Board appointments were identified/advanced during the fiscal year: Ellie Crosby, Jean Taylor, and Johanna Hillard

Committees & Subcommittees

- Five committees: Executive, Finance, Governance, Legislative Affairs, and Conservation
- Two subcommittees/task forces: Board Engagement Subcommittee and Zoo Board Bylaws & Zoo/Foundation MOU Task Force
- 548 total Board member working hours, including meeting and officer working time

Board Participation

Measure	FY26 Participation
Board meeting attendance	66%
Committee participation	91%
Board member giving	91%
Zoo event participation	73%
Beastly Bash participation	70%
Wildlife Conservation Benefit participation	39%
Relationship cultivation participation	39%

Board meeting attendance and meeting minutes are maintained in Board records and are available upon request.

FY2026 Minnesota Zoo Operations

Public Engagement & Education

- Served nearly 1.36 million visitors
- Provided education program experiences for 148,970 participants
- Provided 113,890 free admissions through the Free to Explore program for Minnesotans who qualify for public assistance
- Hosted Jack-O-Lantern Spectacular for its seventh year, September–November 2025
- Launched Wanderlight Trail, an immersive evening experience, June–August 2026

Animal Care & Conservation

- Cared for nearly 5,000 animals representing a broad range of species, including threatened and endangered species
- Maintained Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) accreditation through 2028
- Advanced five major conservation programs: Pollinator Conservation, Restoring Freshwater Mussels, Conserving Freshwater Turtles, Restoring Bison, and Protecting Black Rhinos
- Participated in 15 AZA Saving Animals From Extinction (SAFE) programs, including black rhinos, African penguins, monarch butterflies, red pandas, and freshwater mussels

Economic & Community Impact

- Generated \$320 million in annual economic impact

- Served as a statewide resource for conservation, education, recreation, and access to wildlife experiences

Campus & Infrastructure

- Operated a 485-acre campus with 125 buildings, 6.5 miles of roads, and 4.75 miles of pathways within nearly picturesque woodland and aquatic landscapes

Major Capital Projects

Project	Description
Waterfront Renewal Project (Lakeside Plaza)	Replace the failing cantilevered plaza and ramp while restoring wetland habitat, improving water quality, and creating more accessible ways for visitors to experience nature
Japanese Macaque Habitat Renovation	Create a habitat inspired by the macaques' native Japan, with trees, a pond, expanded opportunities for play and social interaction, and design informed by animal care and welfare expertise
Animal Hospital	Update essential infrastructure to meet USDA and modern veterinary standards and strengthen veterinary care for a diverse animal collection of nearly 5,000 individuals
Center for Wildlife Conservation	Showcase the Zoo's 50 years of conservation legacy and impact, and create new opportunities for public engagement and education

Statutory Reporting Note

This report is submitted pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, section 85A.02, subdivision 12, which requires the Minnesota Zoological Board to report to the Legislature by September 15 each year on the activities of the Board and the operation of the Minnesota Zoological Garden during the preceding fiscal year ending June 30.

The financial report required under Minnesota Statutes, section 85A.02, subdivision 5c, is submitted separately to the Office of the Legislative Auditor.

Supporting Documentation: Documentation supporting the information contained in this report is maintained by the Minnesota Zoo and is available upon request.

For more information, please contact Kayla Robb, Zoo Director of Administration, at Kayla.Wallace@state.mn.us.

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