



Roger Williams Park Zoo has been a Rhode Island treasure for more than 150 years and is the state's premier single-site family destination. Our mission as leaders in conservation and animal care is to create engaging experiences that empower guests to join us in conserving wildlife and wild places.

The nonprofit Rhode Island Zoological Society has operated the Zoo since 2005 on behalf of the City of Providence; and its strategic priorities include increasing purpose-driven engagement with our internal and external audiences, fostering a strong connection to our conservation mission. We also strive to elevate the overall zoo experience, enhancing satisfaction and a sense of meaning and belonging for all guests. Third, we prioritize a positive culture of trust, collaboration, and shared accountability, resulting in our people, animals, and organization thriving.

The zoo enjoys the highest attendance of any destination in the state. Each year the Zoo welcomes more than 500,000 daytime guests and over 200,000 more to its evening Jack-O-Lantern and Holiday Lights Spectacular shows. The Roger Williams Park Zoo team includes 86 full-time employees, 165 part-time and seasonal staff and 150 volunteers. Our animal population numbers approximately 800 individuals, representing 128 species of amphibians, arthropods, birds, fish, mammals and reptiles.

Accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums since 1986, Roger Williams Park Zoo also counts membership in the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums among its many professional and conservation affiliations.

Not simply a family destination dedicated to wildlife education and conservation, the Zoo is a driver of the state's economy. In 2024, according to a University of Rhode Island economic impact study, the Zoo had a statewide impact of more than \$75,000,000, contributing to the creation of 864 jobs across a variety of sectors. Comparing the Zoo's \$18million annual operating budget to its impact on the communities we serve, that is greater than a 4:1 ratio.

The Zoo is embarking on a new surge of growth toward realizing the goals mapped out in its master plan. Having completed the magnificent Faces of the Rainforest, an animal quarantine facility, a versatile animal commissary and, most recently, the Conservation Learning Center during the past eight years, we now set our sights on four transformative projects that will carry our mission boldly into the next decade.



Today we ask your approval of House Bill 8354, authorizing an \$18million general obligation bond empowering Roger Williams Park Zoo to complete two of those habitat construction projects and begin a third. We will modify the existing large mammal facility, indoors and out, to optimize it for managing a white rhinoceros herd after the elephants' departure and construct a new habitat for a pride of lions.

It is important to tell you that we are not asking the state to fund these projects alone. Both the Rhode Island Zoological Society and the City of Providence already have fund-raising and funding plans in the pipeline for an additional major animal habitat as a capstone to the existing Faces of the Rainforest complex and to begin remodeling the former education center into a multi-species reptile and amphibian suite. Full bond approval would contribute to its completion.

The Zoo is grateful for previous generous support by the General Assembly and the people of Rhode Island. We are proud of a track record in which we converted that support into tangible results. Faces of the Rainforest, completed in 2018, essentially repaid the investment within three years of completion through double-digit increases in zoo attendance and revenue. The Conservation and Learning Center will be functionally complete by the end of May and we look forward to inviting you to a ribbon-cutting and dedication in September at the start of the new school year.

Bringing joy and education to Rhode Islanders is core to who we are at Roger Williams Park Zoo. Added to the fact that we contribute significantly to the state's prosperity and that we achieve what we set out to do, I hope you will acknowledge that the zoo is both an institution to be proud of and a good investment.

The bottom line, in the literal and financial sense of the term, is that facts show your approval of this bond to power five years of vital zoo construction projects will repay itself in less than four years.