INNOVATIONS IN ZOO: CAMPUS AND EXHIBIT DESIGN

The Elephant Gets His Way: Innovation at Denver Zoo
Denver Zoological Foundation & CLR Design
Field Session: FS-013
ASLA 2014 Annual Meeting & EXPO - Denver
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Learning Objectives:

• Learn about the unique aspects of zoo campus and exhibit design.
• Understand the challenges and opportunities of sustainable site design as part of a LEED Platinum project.
• Learn about new and unique applications of recycled water.
• Learn about storm water management techniques in a campus setting with unique constraints

I. Denver Zoo Front Entry Complex and Predator Ridge

Denver Zoo is home to 3,800 animals representing more than 650 species and is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). AZA accreditation assures the highest standards of animal care. A leader in environmental action, Denver Zoo is dedicated to ensuring the safety of the environment in support of all species and is the first U.S. zoo to receive ISO 14001 certification for the entire facility and operations. This international certification ensures the zoo is attaining the highest environmental standards.

The Denver Zoo Front Entry Complex and Predator Ridge is a groundbreaking project completed in 2004. The focus on the guest arrival sequence and revenue operation was unique at the time of completion and began a trend of front entry focus across the country at many zoos. Predator Ridge is a multi-species, flex habitat African predator exhibit that revolutionized both the management of large carnivores and zoo exhibit visitor experience.

A. Discussion will focus on the important aspects of visitor entry and orientation and innovations in animal management and visitor experience.

II. Denver Zoo Campus and Design

Early municipal leaders had a vision for the city that included transforming the short grass prairie full of sagebrush and rattlesnakes into a civic jewel, exemplifying their “City Beautiful” concept. In 1881 City Park was initiated by Richard Sopris, who served as a previous mayor and became known as the “Father of City Park.” In 1896 the new mayor Thomas S. McMurray sent a black bear to City Park and started what was to become Denver Zoo. Denver Zoo has transformed many times over the ensuing years and now spans 80 acres. This history charts the unique aspects of zoological campus design and animal exhubitory.

A. A brief presentation will orient participants to the present Denver Zoo campus and iterations of master plans including the most recent plan developed from 2011-2014.
B. Included in the presentation will be an introduction to the unique and innovative aspects of selected Denver Zoo exhibits.
C. There will also be an introduction Denver Zoo sustainability practices, including recycled water, ISO 14001 certification, and a unique campus waste-to-energy system.
III. Walk to Toyota Elephant Passage

The walk through the zoo from the Gates Education Building to Toyota Elephant Passage is transects generations of zoo design and provides an opportunity to observe the topics discussed in the presentation.

IV. Toyota Elephant Passage

Toyota Elephant Passage is a ten acre, ten building LEED platinum exhibit complex that allows visitors to explore and discover the rich history of animals in Asian culture, their complicated relationship with humans and the efforts Denver Zoo and its colleagues undertake to protect their future. Guests are immersed in Asian wildlife and culture through multi-sensory experiences providing greater awareness and understanding of the role we all must play in protecting wildlife for future generations. In addition to elephants, the exhibit is home to other Asian species, including rhinos, tapirs, small clawed otters, fishing cats and gibbons.

With six large animal habitats contained in the facility, the complex exhibit features more than 130 animal transfer gates managed from a central control center, connecting two miles of trails and creating the most dynamic and complex mega-vertebrate exhibit in the world.

A. The tour will walk through the “front of house” exhibit, discussing multiple aspects of the design including theme work, visitor experience, animal management and containment, exhibit storm water management, and exhibit horticulture.

B. There will be observation and discussion of the challenges and opportunities of sustainable site design as part of a LEED platinum project.

C. There will be an opportunity to see the unique applications of recycled water for animal and horticultural management.

D. A walk “behind the scenes” will reveal the other side of many of the design challenges in the Toyota Elephant Passage site and operations.

E. There will also be an opportunity to see the operation of the unique waste-to-energy system converting zoo waste into useable onsite energy.

V. Walk to Front Entry Complex and Predator Ridge

The walk through the zoo from Toyota elephant passage back to the Front Entry complex will provide one more opportunity to discuss the history and unique aspects of Denver Zoo.
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George Pond is the Vice President for Design and Campus Management at Denver Zoo; he is responsible for the development and execution of the zoo’s facility master plan, including the design and construction of new exhibits and facility improvements. George oversees the Facilities Group which is responsible for facilities planning and design, management of grounds and horticulture, maintenance of all existing facilities, and the zoo’s safety and sustainability initiatives including the development of a unique waste to energy system.

George holds a Masters in Architecture and a Masters in Landscape Architecture, both from the University of Colorado at Denver, and a Bachelor of Arts in English from Kenyon College. George has been with the zoo for 13 years and during that time has also served on faculty at the College of Architecture and Planning at the University of Colorado at Denver as a lecturer and senior instructor in landscape architecture, and is currently an elected City Councilman in Wheat Ridge, Colorado.

Jeffrey Sawyer is an associate with over 15 years of experience at CLR Design Inc., located in Philadelphia, PA. CLR is celebrating 30 years of creating zoo master plans and implementing immersive, experiential animal exhibits all over the world. Jeff’s interest in sustainable design has helped create several LEED projects and integrate sustainable features into CLR’s animal exhibition. Jeff has a Bachelor’s of Landscape Architecture from Pennsylvania State University.