



LAKE SUPERIOR ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Our mission: to provide close-up animal experiences which inspire connections to wildlife and action toward conservation in our region and around the world.

The Lake Superior Zoo: One Year Later

June 13, 2013 – Duluth, MN A raging Kingsbury Creek flooded the Lake Superior Zoo on June 20, 2012, causing unprecedented damage to buildings and grounds, as well as the loss of many beloved zoo animals. No one could have predicted that a swath of heavy rainfall would linger over the Twin Ports area that night and produce seven to ten inches of rain. Flash flooding, from Carlton County through the Duluth area and into Douglas County and Bayfield County in Wisconsin, took its toll on roads and bridges and caused severe damage to property throughout our region. The zoo was in the path of destruction.

The torrent of flood water from the almost 6,000 acres of watershed from Kingsbury Creek deposited tons of sand, silt and debris in the low-lying areas of the zoo property, including the, train depot/playground area. Polar Shores and the barnyard saw significant flooding; four feet in the barnyard and 14 feet at Polar Shores. Fourteen animals lost their lives including six sheep, four goats, a donkey, a turkey vulture, a raven and a snowy owl. The waters were high enough that the harbor seals, Vivian and Feisty, and polar bear, Berlin, were able to exit their habitats. The harbor seals were found outside of the zoo property, probably by the flood waters pushing them through a culvert; the polar bear remained on zoo property near her exhibit and was tranquilized and moved to safety. Zoo staff was able to rescue the foxes and otters as the water receded.

It's now one year later and we know the community has many questions about the zoo. This communication aims to answer those questions and provide information on the current status of the zoo.

NEW ANIMALS AT OUR ZOO

Have you replaced any of the animals you lost in the flood? Yes! Darla, the miniature horse and the lone barnyard survivor has been joined by:

- "Lynnard" the Llama
- five new sheep (three baby doll named Lucky, Robert and Clark Kent; two Shetland named Ruby and Wendy)
- Eight new goats (two pygmy named Mugsy and Spatz, three alpine/nubian named Sparkle, Ace and Dunsten; three pygora named Flyn, Dante and Drew)
- "Harry" the miniature jack donkey

What other new animals do you have at the zoo?

- American crow
- Two Burrowing owl
- Green tree python
- Ball python
- Ghost phase corn snake
- Milk snake
- Degu
- Large Spotted genet
- Two Chinese goral
- Snow leopard
- Cedar waxwing
- Grey tree frog
- Pine grosbeak
- Robin

Are there other animals coming to the zoo soon? Yes! On exhibit in June:

- Two wood chucks (who happen to be brothers)
- 15 chicks of various "not the kind you see every day" breeds: Modern BB Red Game, Lakenvelder, and Silver Pencil Rock
- 10 neotenic salamanders

Are you going to get another snowy owl/raven/turkey vulture? The three species will be considered during the planning of future exhibits and education programs.

FACILITY/EXHIBIT UPDATES

Pavilion Renovation

Our 75 year old building was built by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and has been the site used for public events, picnics, school programs and family gatherings. Plans include a 3 season gathering space for groups, education, picnics, special events and shelter from rain. We are excited to once again host company picnics, community groups and classes and we hope to add the zoo as a destination wedding location.

Barnyard

The zoo's barnyard features many new animals and a contact yard, allowing our guests to get "up close and personal" with the animals (currently 13, soon to be 15). Docents are on hand to answer questions and provide supervision for the encounters.

Train Depot

The new zoo train depot, replacing the one that was swept away in the flood, is well under construction and is located near the Primate Conservation Center.

Kingsbury Creek Restoration

The Minnesota DNR along with the City is working to remove sediment deposited by the flood and to restore the south section of Kingsbury Creek. Plans include removing Raven Island the dam, rechanneling the creek up to the WPA exhibit near the playground and restore native vegetation along its banks. The project will begin shortly after August 1st and finish before October 1st. The zoo's longer-range plans for the creek are to restore the riparian zone to its original habitat. We'd love to have a vibrant trout stream.

Remaining Repairs

We still have damaged paths near the deer yard that will be repaired this summer. If you visit the zoo you will see areas that still need to be planted with grass and landscaped. The biggest remaining repair, of course, is the Polar Shores exhibit.

DISLOCATED ANIMALS

POLAR BEAR – "BERLIN"

When is Berlin coming back? A lot of things would need to fall in place before Berlin could return to Duluth from being on loan to the Kansas City Zoo. Berlin's "Polar Shores" exhibit was severely damaged in the June flood and she cannot be returned to it as it is currently designed due to safety concerns and increased husbandry standards. While it's no guarantee, it is POSSIBLE she could return if a new exhibit was built or significant modifications were made to the current Polar Shores exhibit area.

Is Berlin pregnant? The staff at the KC Zoo observed copulation during the first weeks of April between Berlin and Nikita. The next thing to look for in Berlin would be some denning behavior in November or December. We're keeping our fingers crossed. She's our "little bear that could", so keep cheering her on.

What if Berlin has cub(s)? The LS Zoo, Toledo Zoo and KC Zoo have developed and approved a breeding loan where we will take "ownership" of the 1st, 6th and 7th cub born.

Why Did She Go To Kansas City and Not Just Stay at Como Park? The species survival plan (SSP) breeding recommendation for Berlin is that she be paired with Nikita at Kansas City in the hope that they will produce offspring so that we continue to have a viable captive population. The number of captive Polar bears in AZA accredited institutions is 68. Of those, only 35 are capable of breeding. Berlin is one of 21 females within the optimal breeding age. She is an important part of a declining captive polar bear gene pool and we owe it a try. The decision to transfer Berlin was extensively discussed between all zoological institutions involved so the best decision for Berlin could be made. It was agreed that she was healthy for travel and that the Kansas City Zoo has the best resources available for her care. A cub would be a win "all the way round". Polar bears are currently the #1 conservation ambassadors in the world.

Why can't the zoo just put a polar bear back in the Polar Shores exhibit? Back in 1990 when the exhibit was built the husbandry standards for polar bears were followed. Since then, the standards have changed substantially. The pool's pumps are severely damaged. The exhibit remains in the flood plain and considerable changes/modifications would need to occur in order to assure animal safety.

RIVER OTTERS

Where are the river otters? The river otters are living on-grounds at the zoo's Animal Care Center (ACC) holding area. The otters are geriatric and are beginning to require additional attention from the animal care staff that comes with age. Living in the ACC has all the advantages an aging otter needs: three pools of varying depth, access to the outdoors, air conditioned inside and access to great staff. They will most likely live out their days at ACC while the zoo works on developing the master plan which includes an otter facility.

FOXES

Where are the foxes? The red/silver foxes are temporarily housed off exhibit. Plans are being developed for an exhibit adjacent to the new chicken coop at the barnyard.

HARBOR SEALS

Where are the harbor seals? Our geriatric harbor seals "Vivian" (blind with age) and the infamous "Feisty" were transferred to Como Park Zoo and Conservatory immediately following the flood. They were initially housed off exhibit and were doing very well. Unfortunately, Vivian was euthanized in March after emergency exploratory surgery when she was exhibiting lethargy and weight loss. The surgery revealed that she had numerous adhesions and scar tissue in stomach and intestine. Feisty remains at the Como Park Zoo and Conservatory and is on exhibit with other seals and doing well.

OPERATIONAL ISSUES

What was the financial impact of the flood on the zoo? We were closed for a month, during the peak of the tourist season. Here's an analogy- if you had a retail store and you were forced to be closed between Thanksgiving and Christmas, this is what the zoo experienced. We lost an estimated \$250,000 - \$350,000 in revenue. We were hopeful that there would be some flood recovery funds available to help with these losses, but unfortunately, that was not the case.

What was covered by insurance? The City had insurance with a \$250,000 deductible on the buildings/equipment (covering Polar Shores and the barn).

Did you or will you get any FEMA money? Some FEMA money helped the zoo with the emergency clean-up costs.

Did the zoo receive any Minnesota Recovers Task Force funds? The zoo submitted a proposal, via the City of Duluth to the Minnesota Recovers Task Force. It was believed that the zoo would be successful in obtaining the funds set aside for those impacted by the flood. The zoo's \$12,000,000 proposal included a new polar bear exhibit out of the flood plain. The request was denied. The decision was appealed and it was again denied. We were informed that the zoo's project did not meet the criteria set forth by the legislature when this fund was created.

Related to the zoo property, the City of Duluth received notice of the commitment of funds from the Minnesota Recovers Task Force to repair a lift-station on zoo grounds, assist with the emergency cleanup costs, and to repair some of the damages to Kingsbury Creek.

How has the zoo improved security?

The zoo has on-site security evening and over-nights. Over-night coverage began shortly after the flood.

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

Did the flood impact your future plans for the zoo?

The master plan was developed in 2009-2010 without fully understanding or appreciating the magnitude of potential flooding from Kingsbury Creek. This has resulted in the zoo reviewing the master plan to determine the best ways to utilize the Kingsbury Creek flood plain without compromising animal, staff and guest safety. Included in this review are structures already present and how they can be used more appropriately.

What will happen to Polar Shores?

Discussions are being made as to how to best use Polar Shores. The Polar Shores facility no longer meets AZA husbandry standards for polar bears and significant modifications must be made before they can be met. The facility is an important asset to both the zoo and community. We, as an organization, must make the best decision based on costs, animal husbandry, guest experience and not just the desire to bring Berlin and polar bears back to Duluth. With that in mind we are working very hard to have a facility within the zoo that meets both AZA husbandry standards and the standards that our Berlin deserves.

The zoo along with the City has worked to find funding in various forms through flood relief and legislative means to build new and/or renovate Polar Shores. At this time these avenues have closed. We are still working with the City and are planning on further exploring our options for funding in both the private/public sector.

###

Contacts:

Sam Maida, CEO

smaida@lszoo.org

(218) 730-4500 ext. 203

Peter Pruett, Director of Zoo Operations

ppruett@lszoo.org

(218) 730-4500 ext. 104

Kim Matteen, Director of Marketing & Membership

kmatteen@lszoo.org

(218) 730-4500, ext. 209

www.lszoo.org

Our mission: *To provide close-up animal experiences which inspire connections to wildlife and action toward conservation in our region and around the world.*