

Fort Worth Zoo Planning Major Renovation Projects

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FORT WORTH (CBSDFW.COM) – Some exciting changes are coming to the Fort Worth Zoo over the next decade. The zoo kicked off a new campaign on Monday called “A Wilder Vision,” in hopes of being able to renovate some of their most popular **animal** exhibits.

While the zoo has already raised \$90 million in private donations, it still needs another \$10 million for improvement projects that are already in the works. That money is being used to develop new exhibit spaces which will allow visitors to observe and learn about the **animals** in more interactive settings.

The first exhibit that is being updated is the African Savannah. The new display will let several different kinds of **animals** roam together freely. It will include a true river for hippos with 70 feet of underwater viewing space. This is all scheduled to open in 2018.

Construction will then shift to an elephant spring that will feature a 500,000 gallon pool. The area will be triple the size of the current elephant exhibit, and will also create more elephant breeding space. This is important to the Fort Worth Zoo because of how popular their two elephant calves have been over the past three years. Belle and Bowie were both born in **summer** 2013 and have been star attractions ever since.

“Fewer and fewer zoos will be breeding elephants,” said Co-chair of the Board Fort Worth Zoological Association and woman credited with making The Fort Worth Zoo nationally recognized for its quality Ramona Bass. “It’s very expensive to build what needs to be built for elephants. And, we are on our third generation and we don’t want to let them go. That’s pretty **special**.”

The new elephant area is set to open in 2020, along with a new ‘Hunters of Africa’ display. That will be the updated exhibit for the Fort Worth Zoo’s collection of big cats such as lions, cheetahs and leopards. A new home for the orangutans is next on the schedule, bringing more jungle animals into the primate exhibit by 2025.

Also planned over the next nine years are more space for black rhinos, which are said to be difficult to keep in captivity, and a new area where Fort Worth Zoo visitors can hand-feed the giraffes.

“The giraffe will come down there and be able to be fed all along the boardwalk,” Zoo Director Michael Fouraker said as pointed to a broad, curving walkway where people will feed giraffes while looking at the eye-to-eye.

Right now, the zoo averages a million visitors a year. But cities like Omaha, Nebraska which recently rebuilt its zoo are able to pull in closer to two million guests a year. The modernization in Fort Worth is expected to create a bigger visitor draw, but the expansion is expected to accommodate them.

“It’s nice to have space, quiet space between exhibits and the feeling that you’re out on nature and not just in an animal park,” Bass said. “To me it’s one of the best zoos in the country. And hopefully after this it will be the best.”

The first phase of expansion, African Savanna, should be completed in Spring 2018.

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