

*Animal  
Ark*



*A Sanctuary for Life*

*Strategic Plan*  
*June 2004*



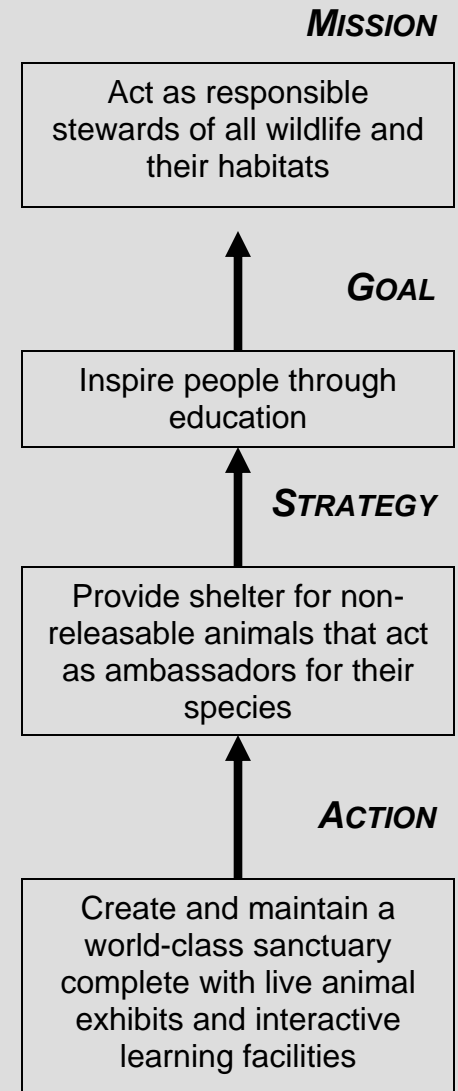
## *Our Mission*

*Animal Ark is a sanctuary for life committed to environmentally conscious stewardship of all wildlife and their habitats. We accomplish this by sheltering non-releasable wildlife and offering our visitors a wild experience with nature.*

## *Our Vision*

*Animal Ark is a safe haven for non-releasable wildlife and is dedicated to inspiring our local and global community by providing a dynamic window into nature. Through this window, we will offer multi-sensory, educational experiences with wildlife and their natural environments.*

### **FRAMEWORK FOR ANIMAL ARK MISSION SUCCESS**



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Animal Ark Wildlife Sanctuary has been dedicated to wildlife and their natural habitats since 1982. We are a sanctuary for life, meaning that we provide permanent care for disadvantaged animals that cannot live in the wild. We believe that through up close and personal observations and innovative educational programs, we can encourage people to conserve wildlife in their native habitats.

It is our belief that wild animals belong in the wild. However, those individuals who are not capable of independently living in their native habitats have the power to represent their wild cousins and educate humanity about the needs and importance of maintaining a healthy environment that includes the full representation of natural predators.

This strategic plan outlines the goals and strategies that Animal Ark Wildlife Sanctuary will implement in the coming years to fulfill our mission and vision statements. Five broad goals will guide us in our future growth:

*Goal 1: Provide permanent shelter for non-releasable wildlife in a healthy, natural, and enriching environment.*

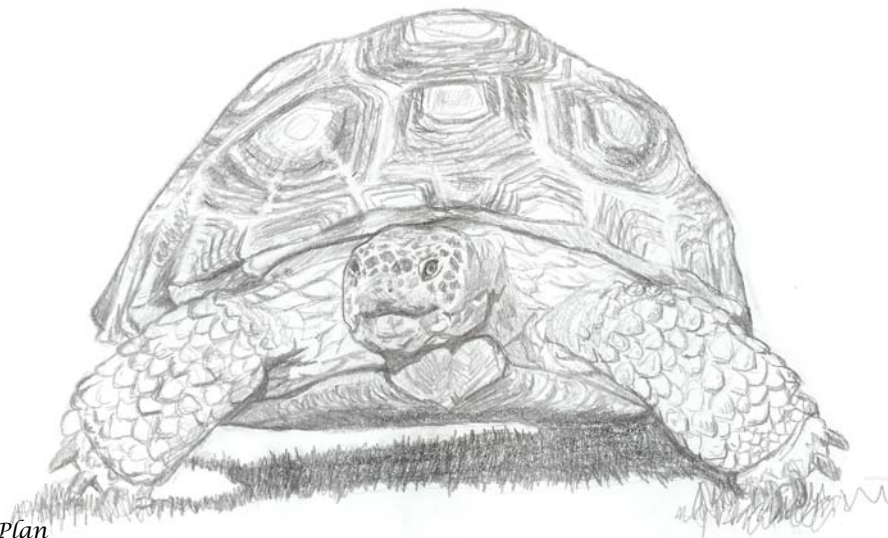
*Goal 2: Develop and maintain an evolving, dynamic and effective learning program that continues to inspire and motivate strong environmental ethics.*

*Goal 3: Develop an outstanding infrastructure to support an expanding, dynamic, and innovative wildlife sanctuary.*

*Goal 4: Create a self-sustaining, financially secure organization that can perpetuate itself far into the future.*

*Goal 5: Shape Animal Ark into a valued and treasured part of our local and global community.*

Through the implementation of this plan, Animal Ark Wildlife Sanctuary will be able to successfully inspire our local and global communities to be responsible stewards of all wildlife and their habitats.



# A COMMITMENT TO WILDLIFE

Animal Ark has housed over 100 animals, most of which are considered predators. It is important to recognize the specialized role predators play in a healthy ecosystem. They have a profound influence on biological communities via predation and interspecific competition. By regulating or limiting the numbers of their prey, they can alter the structure and function of entire ecosystems. Predation often allows for the coexistence of more prey species, thereby increasing community diversity and maintaining native biodiversity. Since most predators tend to focus on the young and elderly, the sick and injured, and the weak and unfit, they help keep prey populations healthy and vigorous.

Most top predators like wolves and grizzly bears are considered to be keystone species – species that have significant impacts on other species and set the pace for the entire ecosystem. They can be likened to the keystone that holds all the other stones in an arch in place. The absence of these predators creates a cascading ripple effect down the ecosystem food chain, causing significant imbalances and disruption of normal ecosystem functions. The removal of one type of predator often increases populations of other predators to abnormally high levels. These disruptions, imbalances, and fragmentations can lead to degradation of biodiversity at all levels, including both plants and animals. The ramifications of such degradation are just beginning to be understood.



Worldwide, many predator populations, especially top carnivores such as tigers, snow leopards and wolves, are declining at alarming rates. Factors contributing to this decline include loss or fragmentation of habitat, large-scale conversions of habitats, competition with non-native species, and direct conflict with humans. In many cases, the ecology and biology of these species are not well understood and there is often a poor public perception of predators. In addition, predators are often shy and allusive, contributing to the misunderstandings and myths that often surround these animals. By offering permanent housing to representatives of many of these species, Animal Ark can contribute to the conservation of wild predators by helping to educate the public about the important and necessary role these animals play in their native ecosystems.

In captivity, predators needing homes are more common than any other type of animal. These animals are particularly prevalent in the exotic pet trade and often people who keep predators as pets do not realize the responsibility that such animals require. When these animals become unmanageable, new homes must be sought. In other cases, wild animals are kept illegally and when officials confiscate the animals they cannot be returned to the wild. This creates an excess of wild animals needing permanent care yet few facilities have space and funding to provide such care. Animal Ark contributes to the solution of this problem in two very important ways. First, Animal Ark provides permanent homes for many of these unwanted animals. Secondly, Animal Ark educates the public about the difficulties of keeping exotic animals as pets and discourages this practice.

# ANIMAL ARK – WHO ARE WE?

Animal Ark Wildlife Sanctuary began in 1980 although the idea was conceived two years previous. It started with the acquisition of two gray wolves by Diana and Aaron Hiibel, co-founders of Animal Ark. The Hiibels quickly learned that wild animals do not make good pets and that there were many misconceptions about wolves in general. After much research and hands-on experience, a desire to share the knowledge with others soon developed. A slide show on wolves and other wild animals that were housed by the Hiibels was developed and offered to the public, along with tours for children to see the animals. During this time, the first in a long line of requests to house disadvantaged wildlife was made of the Hiibels. As more animals were provided permanent care, a desire for relocation into a natural environment with more acreage prompted the Hiibels to search for property. Thus, with the purchase of remote acreage in Red Rock Estates, just 25 miles northwest of downtown Reno, Animal Ark was born.



In spring of 1982, Animal Ark opened its Nature Trail Program. This was the beginning of fulfilling the public education portion of its mission. It was approved by the Washoe County School District as an official field trip and through this special program, thousands of children have learned about nature and the wild animals that live there. At this time, Animal Ark opened only once a year to the general public to allow them to see what their children were learning and to enjoy the animals.

Throughout these early years, Animal Ark continued to accept more disadvantaged wildlife. These animals included bear, coyote, bobcat, mountain lion, and kit fox. Some of these animals were being kept illegally as exotic pets while others had suffered permanent injuries precluding their release back to the wild. In addition to the many animals that became residents, Animal Ark also housed several orphan animals until they could be returned to the wild. In April of 1986, Animal Ark received non-profit status 501(c) (3) from the Federal Government.

Due to numerous visitation requests, Animal Ark applied for and received in February 1994, a permit from the Washoe County Planning Commission to expand the facility and open to the general public on a regular basis. At this time, the Ark was only open Thursday through Sunday. New animal exhibits and public facilities were added or updated and in 1997, Animal Ark opened on a daily basis for the first time. Due to a high elevation with more winter snowfall, public admission was limited on a seasonal basis from April 1 to October 31. A special winter visitation day has always been part of the schedule to allow visitors the opportunity to see the animals in their beautiful winter coats. Currently Animal Ark is open daily except for Mondays. With a network of 50 volunteers and only 6 paid staff persons, Animal Ark provides a wild experience to over ten thousand visitors and an additional five thousand school children each year.

From the very beginning, Animal Ark has strived to provide a safe haven for non-releasable wildlife. Exhibits are designed to be comfortable, spacious, and appropriate for each animal that the Ark agrees to take in, and are constructed with the highest quality materials and workmanship possible. While providing comfortable space for the animals, these exhibits are also designed to enhance the visitor's experience. Since many of Animal Ark's residents are predators and therefore elusive and shy in nature, this provides a rare opportunity for the public to get up close and personal with the animals.

Part of Animal Ark's commitment to resident wildlife is not just providing food and shelter, but also a stimulating and rich habitat. Through a special enrichment program, all animals receive stimulating activities and toys to help break up boredom. For example, food for the omnivores is often hidden in the enclosure rather than simply given in a dish. Novel toys such as plain cardboard boxes and hard plastic balls are periodically provided. New scents are sprayed around enclosures and novel food items such as frozen foods, popsicles, and pumpkins are given on special occasions.

It is Animal Ark's philosophy that each animal that is taken in is provided a home for life. It is not Animal Ark's policy to engage in captive breeding for the purposes of selling or trading of animals. It is our belief that wild animals belong in the wild and for those individuals that are not capable of surviving in the wild on their own, they have the power to represent their wild cousins and educate humanity about the needs and importance of maintaining a healthy environment that includes the full representation of natural predators.

While living up to this philosophy, Animal Ark is also committed to using environmentally friendly energy policies wherever possible. At this time, most of Animal Ark's energy needs are met by using passive solar panels and wind generation. An educational display in the gift shop informs visitors about the solar panels and more interpretive signs are planned for the future.

Animal Ark embraces community spirit and relies on the local community for support and resources. A strong network of volunteers, doing everything from taking care of resident wildlife, providing interpretive talks and information to the public, and facilitating the endless day-to-day tasks, is the basis for the organization. Without the commitment of these volunteers, Animal Ark would not be able to continue to operate. While not only helping with tasks involving the daily running of the facility, our network of volunteers are in the community actively promoting Animal Ark and educating the public about wild animals and the environment.

As a strong organization and member of the community, we believe that education is the most essential tool in making positive changes in our environmental policies. We implement this idea by providing interpretive signage throughout the facility, always having knowledgeable and well-trained docents available to answer questions, providing educational outreach talks, and maintaining educational materials on our websites. Animal Ark is always striving to make ourselves available to educate our community and our visitors and we are constantly creating and implementing new ideas and methods to promote a dynamic and innovative educational program. Our current education program being developed incorporates the Washoe County School Board Science Curriculum and is specifically tailored to each individual grade level, providing a full 6 years of education at the Ark.

In the future, Animal Ark will continue to implement our mission and vision statement as outlined in the following pages. Animal Ark will continue to seek to make our role in the community a strong one and continue to build a strong constituency and support for not only the captive inhabitants of Animal Ark, but for all native wildlife and their habitats.



# A VISION FOR THE FUTURE ANIMAL ARK WILDLIFE SANCTUARY:

*Animal Ark is a safe haven for non-releasable wildlife and is dedicated to inspiring our local and global community by providing a dynamic window into nature. Through this window, we will offer multi-sensory, educational experiences with wildlife and their natural environments.*

## **In thinking about the future of Animal Ark, we envision that we will**

provide a permanent, stimulating, healthy, and natural environment for all resident wildlife.....

while increasing public awareness of wild animals and their habitats through education.....

and promoting a strong environmental ethic through the use of alternate energy and cultivating an appreciation and profound respect of nature and all things wild.

## **Animal Ark stresses these principles in fulfilling its mission:**

- **Integrity** – In a world that is often confusing and tumultuous, the Board believes that strong morals and values will guide us in our decision-making and keep us strong in our dedication to our mission.
- **Dedication** – Our commitment is first and foremost to the animals entrusted in our care. We will continually strive to develop and expand our facilities for the comfort and safety of all our animals. At the same time, we will not seek out animals for commercial breeding purposes and will endeavor to maintain Animal Ark as a facility for non-releasable animals. At no time will we trade or sell animals for the financial gain of the organization or any one individual within that organization.
- **Commitment** – By pursuing our mission with an imaginative, energetic, and positive outlook, we are contributing to the global conservation of all wildlife and their habitats and making our world a better place to live.
- **Community Support** – The Board of Trustees believes that Animal Ark cannot be successful in our mission unless the community, including local governments, corporations, businesses, and private citizens, support us.
- **Creativity** – Given limited financial resources, the Board approaches mission implementation with a creative, entrepreneurial spirit.
- **Partnerships** – The Board believes that we must continually pursue local, national, and international partnerships to bring other cultures and perspectives into the spotlight to provide us with a well-rounded worldview and a strong supportive network in which to fulfill our mission.

# GOALS AND STRATEGIES

The following framework lays the foundation for the success of Animal Ark Wildlife Sanctuary. While we strive for these successes it is important to have a direction that guides us to meet our objectives. By implementing the following goals and strategies, Animal Ark can make significant contributions to the responsible stewardship of all wildlife and their native habitats.

*Goal I: Provide permanent shelter for non-releasable wildlife in a healthy, natural, and enriching environment.*

It is our belief that by housing non-releasable animals, we can inspire people around the world to become proactive environmental stewards. The animals that live at Animal Ark are there because they can no longer support themselves in the wild. Some are unwanted exotic pets while others have sustained permanent injuries. All of them are special animals that act as ambassadors for their species. We believe that by observing animals in large and natural enclosures, we can inspire people to learn about wild species and their special ecological roles. We also hope that by educating people to the needs of these animals that we can help stem the tide of the exotic pet trade – particularly for the large predatory species that often end up as unwanted surplus animals.

We believe that animals belong in the wild – to be free and live as they were meant to be. However, animals that cannot be in the wild offer the opportunity to learn about species that may not otherwise be easily observed. To this end, we consider all of our resident animals to be wild – we do not promote them as pets or as tame animals. Although some animals receive training and do participate in educational outreach programs, the goal of Animal Ark is to allow visitors the opportunity to see these animals in as natural an environment as we can offer.

This opportunity comes with responsibility – principally to create and maintain the most natural environment for the comfort and long-term care of our animals. This requires us to continually monitor the health of our animals, and provide the best diets and supplementary vitamins and minerals to ensure a healthy and long life. When animals do have medical problems, it is incumbent upon us to seek out the best care for that animal and to make decisions that put the health and well being of that animal first and foremost. It requires us to maintain large enclosures that provide a safe and natural habitat for each animal resident. It requires us to provide stimulating and enriching activities for our animals, particularly those activities that elicit natural behaviors.



Animal Ark has a long history of providing quality care for each and every one of our resident animals. We have accomplished this by continually challenging ourselves to create the best possible habitats and facilities. Sometimes this has involved difficult decisions, such as not taking in a new animal because we could not adequately provide food and shelter for it. But it is these difficult decisions that allow us to maintain the quality of life of our current residents. It is our belief that we can continue to expand while maintaining our commitment to excellence.

## Strategies for Goal I

- Expand, restructure, or otherwise improve animal habitats and exhibits as necessary to provide each animal with the largest, most stimulating, and most comfortable enclosure possible.
- Continue to monitor diets, behavior and other special needs to provide the best care for all resident wildlife.
- As funding allows, continue to accept and provide homes for additional non-releasable animals.
- Be creative and innovative in enrichment programs and other quality of life issues to provide each animal with the best quality of life as possible.



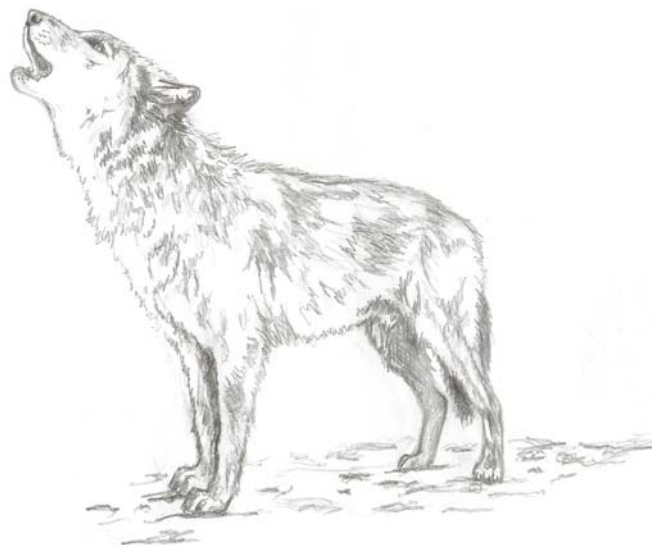
*Goal II: Develop and maintain an evolving, dynamic and effective learning program that continues to inspire and motivate strong environmental ethics.*

Educated people tend to make more proactive decisions and have a strong commitment to nature. Much of this education begins in childhood. It is incumbent upon us to pass on a legacy of strong environmental ethics – a respect for nature that produces a desire to be proactive and conscientious environmental stewards. Education is the key to conservation.

Animal Ark has held this belief since our inception. In fact, it was the primary reason that Animal Ark was created. When we were first established, we created a nature trail program that taught children basic ecological principals and began to instill in them a belief that animals are an important part of our world and that a healthy, functioning ecosystem is essential to our own health and well being. This program created a sense of ownership about nature and a sense of responsibility for its maintenance. It taught children that individual decisions do have an impact and that each of us has a responsibility to live in an environmentally friendly way.

The Nature Trail was destroyed in a devastating wildfire in 1999. However, the ideals the Nature Trail was built upon have continued to direct our education programs. Five thousand school children visit Animal Ark each year. Staff and volunteers conduct special educational tours of the facility and use nature boxes and other props to teach children not only about the animals that live at Animal Ark, but also about habitat requirements, predator-prey relationships, physiological processes such as hibernation and aestivation, and other ecological and biological principals. Visitors are encouraged to learn by observation – to connect behaviors they observe with their function in nature. We educate people about the differences and the similarities between groups of animals such as felines and canines. We encourage active learning and we strive to provide an exciting environment so that learning becomes fun and desirable.

Adults find Animal Ark to be an inspiring and educational facility as well. We strive to offer visitors special amenities that contribute to their overall education including interpretive talks and programs, live animal demonstrations, knowledgeable volunteers to answer questions, and interpretive signage.



## Strategies for Goal II:

- Develop a progressive educational program that provides students with essential biological, ecological, and environmental information that spans grades 1 through 12; with each year's visit building upon concepts learned the previous year. Incorporate hands-on learning with interactive displays.
- Contribute to the appreciation and understanding of nature by developing various nature programs that encourage exploration of native wildlife and their habitats.
- Incorporate dynamic educational displays and signage throughout the park to encourage learning by adults and children. Provide educational materials to visitors that encourage learning at home.
- Develop a "traveling" education program to bring a part of Animal Ark to local schools and community centers.
- Provide excellent comprehensive training to all volunteers and staff so that visitors are educated with accurate and interesting information.
- Increase the number of staff and volunteers to accommodate growing interest in the education programs of Animal Ark.



### ***Goal III: Develop an outstanding infrastructure to support an expanding, dynamic, and innovative wildlife sanctuary.***

In order to provide good quality, natural habitats and to fully educate all visitors, it is critical to provide a strong and exciting infrastructure. We must constantly expand public facilities in order to meet the demands of increased visitor numbers and an ever-expanding population of captive wildlife.

Animal Ark already has a solid foundation in which to build upon. Throughout the years, we have been constantly expanding, improving, and redesigning enclosures and visitor amenities. What started out as a few small enclosures has expanded to over 30 acres – providing large habitats for tigers, snow leopard, black bear, wolves, coyotes, and mountain lion. In the past two years, we have completely revised and expanded our fox exhibits, now including habitats for four of the five native fox species of the United States. We recently created a large exhibit, complete with mature trees and an ant mound, to house cheetahs. This exhibit includes a heated barn to make the cheetah more comfortable during the cold winter months. As part of this exciting addition, we also created a large area to run and exercise our cheetahs that involves a pulley-winch system that stimulates the cheetah to hunt for their prey. We are one of only a few facilities in the United States that runs our cheetahs at high speeds.

In addition to improvements in our animal enclosures, Animal Ark has been striving to offer increased amenities to visitors as well as staff and volunteers. In 2000, the admissions booth and gift shop was expanded and redesigned – a necessity to accommodate the over ten thousand visitors we receive each year. In 2001, a new building was designed and built to provide a state-of-the-art food preparatory and storage facility as well as public restrooms and a volunteer lounge. We recently installed a new solar power system to provide electricity to the gift shop. Additional fencing, signage, picnic facilities, trails, viewing booths, and other visitor amenities are constantly being added, repaired, or upgraded.

Future plans of Animal Ark are likely to include a new groundbreaking visitor center, complete with a Desert Museum and Science Learning Center. Additional interpretative signage, more public areas for picnics and resting, and playgrounds and other interactive learning facilities are essential to supplementing the nature trails programs.

#### **Strategies for Goal III:**

- Maintain in good working condition all public amenities, animal enclosures, volunteer facilities and safety features for the continued enjoyment of all visitors, staff, and volunteers.
- Continue to use alternative energies to meet the current and future needs of Animal Ark.
- Continue our current post-fire landscaping plan and expand the program as funding becomes available.

- Provide training to all volunteers and staff in safety procedures for both animal and human emergencies and promote safety at every opportunity.
- Expand current facilities to meet future needs and continually strive towards innovative, exciting, and creative infrastructure to inspire and educate our visitors and make Animal Ark a destination.
- Design, fund, and build a world-class visitor's center that encourages education, community participation, and a love for nature. Ideally this facility would include conference facilities, meeting rooms, interactive educational exhibits, research facilities, and a community center for special events and university extension courses.
- As part of the visitor's center, create a stimulating, thought provoking, and innovative desert museum that inspires children as well as adults to learn.
- Increase the number of staff and volunteers to better serve our community and provide extended services such as educational talks, educational outreach, courses, and maintenance of the facility that go along with an expanded infrastructure. This would include increased animal care staff, maintenance personnel, fundraising staff, and general office staff.
- Develop a consistent source of water to provide for the water needs of resident wildlife, staff and volunteers, visitor amenities and general maintenance of the facility.



## *Goal IV: Create a self-sustaining, financially secure organization that can perpetuate itself far into the future.*

It is imperative that Animal Ark creates a source of financial income that maintains a stable environment in which we can pursue implementation of our vision. Although the financial market is always volatile and never completely predictable, it is essential that Animal Ark provide sound financial management of current assets while continuing to pursue new sources of income in order to perpetuate itself into the future. Because of our commitment and responsibility to the captive wildlife that lives at Animal Ark, it is especially important that we maintain a basic source of income for food, shelter, and care of those animals.

From our humble beginnings, we have grown to an annual operating budget of \$250,000. Of that, approximately fifty percent represents contributions and grants, including our adoption and membership programs. These contributions and grants are from corporations, private and community foundations, donor advised funds, and private individuals who believe in the mission of Animal Ark. Approximately twenty seven percent is generated by fees from education programs and general admissions. Gift shop sales make up approximately eleven percent of our budget, with the remaining twelve percent coming from recently added special events.

While these funds represent tremendous growth from where we started, they are sources which need to be renewed each year, and which fluctuate based on many local and economic factors. At the same time, animal care costs, including food and veterinary services, have more than doubled in the last five years. In order to continue to provide the quality of life for the animals, as well as our commitment to excellence, a sustainable income stream is necessary. An endowment fund would provide investment income that could be relied upon, even when the facility is closed or when other outside factors reduced other income sources, and is planned for Animal Ark's future.

In addition to current operations of the facility, funding will be needed for Animal Ark's imminent growth, including the purchase of the land to secure the existence of Animal Ark for future generations of children and animals alike.

### **Strategies for Goal IV:**

- Raise consistent, perpetual funds to fully support day-to-day operations, particularly during the winter "closed" months.
- Increase donor funds to support future facility expansion including a new visitor's center, desert museum center, expanded animal habitats, and other infrastructure development.
- Initiate a capital campaign to purchase the land that Animal Ark is currently leasing.
- Secure long-term funding to support key paid personnel, including benefits (healthcare, retirement) by developing endowment funds and planned giving programs.



## *Goal V: Shape Animal Ark into a valued and treasured part of our local and global community.*

To continually pursue our mission we must create a facility that is supported by our local community as well as the global community at large. We must foster and nurture relationships with individuals, governments, corporations, and other conservation groups, providing a platform for us to succeed in our endeavors. We must continually pursue new partnerships and implement novel programs to strengthen our relationship with our own community as well as build a network of connections to the global community.

We have continually strived to create partnerships with local, state, and federal agencies. We have a strong relationship with the Nevada Department of Wildlife, county wildlife officials, the Nevada Humane Society, local veterinarians, wildlife rehabilitators, and other organizations. We are a part of the American Sanctuary Association and continually network with other high-quality sanctuaries throughout the country. We have partnered with other facilities such as Wild About Cats and De Wildt Cheetah and Wildlife Centre in South Africa, to promote conservation of animals in their native habitats. We participate in scientific research and provide support for local students who are conducting projects in biology and ecology. We support, and are in turn supported by, local chapters of the American Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts who often do special projects for Animal Ark. We have partnered with the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Program and other college and university programs to recover and revegetate the facility after a devastating wildfire.

There is much room to grow in this area. Pursuing a closer relationship with local, regional, and national media outlets will help in reaching out to our local community. Partnering with universities and colleges will increase the success of developing specific projects and programs for Animal Ark. New partnerships within our local and global community will develop a sense of pride and ownership of Animal Ark and will provide a strong supportive network.

### **Strategies for Goal V:**

- Expand and diversify the Board of Trustees and secure a network of trusted advisors.
- Develop and cultivate partnerships with local, regional, and national media outlets such as news stations, newspapers, and magazines.
- Partner with local tourist groups such as Chambers of Commerce, Nevada Commission of Tourism, travel agencies, and tourist companies to encourage visitation and support.
- Seek out and develop partnerships with local nurseries, builder supply stores, and other local businesses to help us expand and maintain all facets of Animal Ark.
- Partner with other local, national, and international conservation groups, particularly those that are working with the wild cousins of resident wildlife, to network, communicate knowledge, and share resources, skills, and expertise.
- Partner with local County and Regional parks to host special events or conduct educational outreach.
- Continue to offer inspiring encounters with nature to make visitors want to return.

*This strategic plan sets the foundation for the future growth of Animal Ark Wildlife Sanctuary and is the framework within which we will work to fulfill our mission and vision statements. By implementing the goals and strategies of this plan, we will be able to grow Animal Ark into the world-class organization we envision for our future. The upcoming years will require dedication, imagination, and steadfast commitment to our values. Throughout this process, we must also be willing to take time and reassess our goals and strategies and make changes to accommodate an ever-changing community landscape. By being open to change, yet remaining committed to our founding ideals, Animal Ark will be able to successfully inspire our local and global communities to be environmentally conscious stewards of all wildlife and their habitats.*

## ANIMAL ARK BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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Aaron Hiibel  
President

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Diana Hiibel  
Secretary

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Jennifer Newmark  
Vice President

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Marla Hummel  
Treasurer



*A Sanctuary for Life*