



Houston Zoo Volunteer Training

ACT: PAPER RECYCLING



The goal of this continuing education opportunity is to offer Volunteers at the Houston Zoo the tools and training to effectively engage guests with messaging that supports the mission of the Houston Zoo

The information offered here is meant to supplement the training course and should be read prior to attending training.

***“Interpretation** is a mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource.” – National Association for Interpretation (NAI)*

Think about what the “resource” is here at the Houston Zoo. Our individual animals? Our conservation programs? A little of both? As we move forward as both an institution and as a live-interpretation program, our focus is going to be more on connecting our guests with the individual animals in our collection. The hope is that once an emotional relationship is established, behavior change will be more easily achieved.

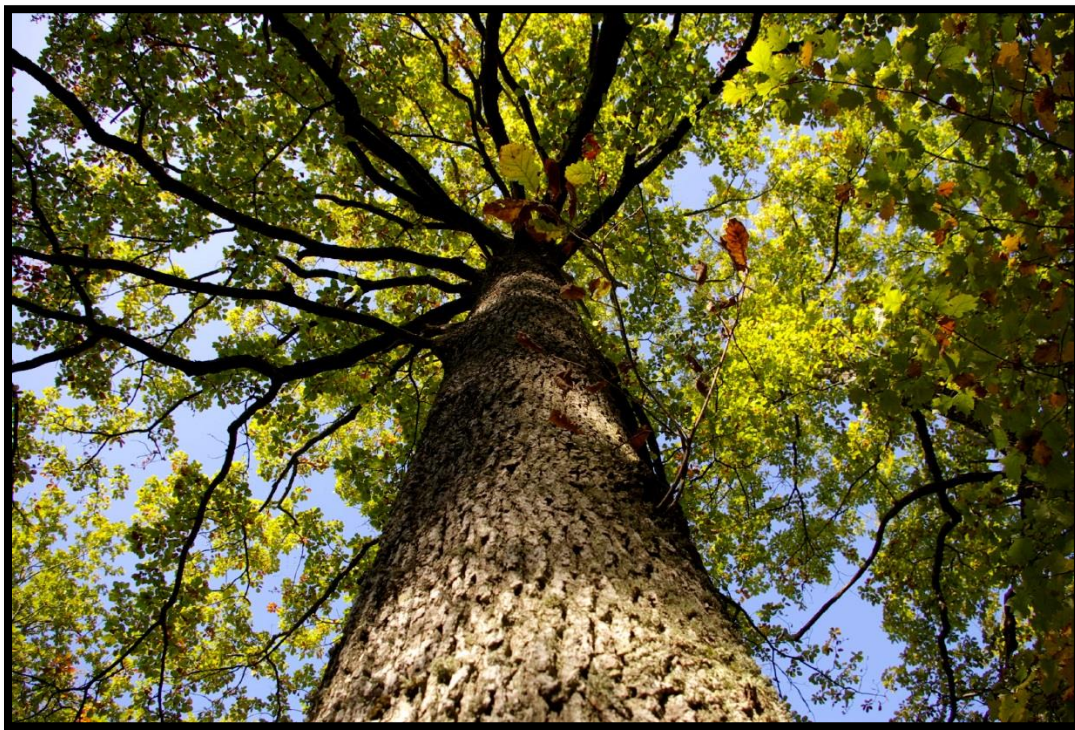
So how do we forge emotional and intellectual connections? By relating our conversations and presentations to our guests’ interests and lives. Basically, we are answering the question: *What can I do?* There are some who would argue we should be answering: *Why should I care?* The reality is that most people know the answer to this and actually *do* care. Consider what our end goal is. Are we asking people to *care* or are we asking for them to *change* their behavior?



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The use of paper dates back to ancient Egypt and the papyrus plant from which the modern word *paper* is derived. The actual paper-making process where the fibers are disintegrated and pressed came later in China around 100 BC. Since then, paper has played a pivotal role in preserving the art and written word of human history.

Today, we use paper without even thinking about it. We write on it, read from it, eat off it, clean with it, and even use it in the restroom. Paper is everywhere and it is invaluable. The problem lies in how we use it. When viewed as a single use item and rabidly consumed without thought to where it comes from, our natural resources become vulnerable.



When speaking to our guests about any of the Zoo's Conservation Initiatives, it is important to remember to highlight what the Zoo is doing to help as well as the simple things our guests can do. We want to avoid the "doom and gloom" presentations that leave guests feeling guilty and helpless. Our main goal is to encourage behavior change and empower guests to make and be those changes!

When opening conversations, it is most effective to begin with the animals themselves. Of course, if you are already in conversation with a guest about a conservation topic, use your best judgement. However, studies have shown that behavior change is most effective if spurred by an **empathetic connection**. If guests have some sort of connection to the wild world we are trying to save, they are more inclined to want to help it.



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As an ACT (Animal Conservation Team) Volunteer, you will be able to talk about this message across many areas of the zoo. We encourage you to be creative, but here are a few ideas of where you can message and the animals found in these habitats. Please research natural history and our collection via the [Dashboard](#):

Black Bears

Belle and Willow are amazing ambassadors for bears in the wild. Their story, found on the Dashboard, is a great example of what happens when wildlife begins to encounter humans. Relying on forests for our paper supply affects animals like our black bears



Natural Encounters

Inside the Rainforest exhibit lives several different species that need trees to survive. The clear cutting of forests for paper and exotic hardwood needs affects animals like these to depend on their arboreal habitats.

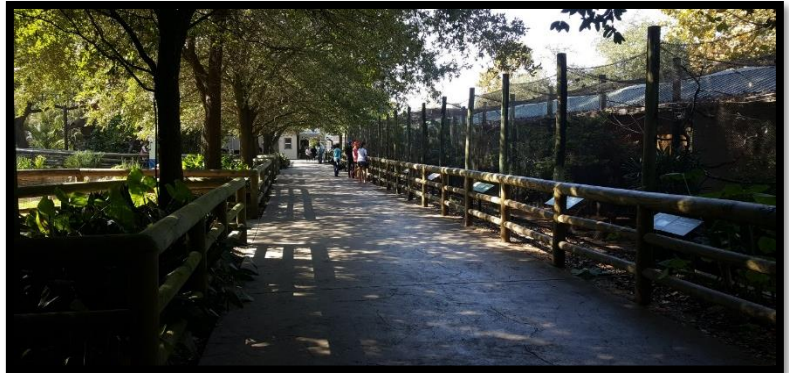




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Birds of the World

The area by “Stormy the Bird Bank” known internally as *Pheasant Run* is Birds of the World to our zoo guests. Birds are naturally a great subject to talk about when discussing Paper Recycling as they are utterly dependent on trees for safety, reproducing, and much of their food supply.



John P. McGovern Children's Zoo

The Forest area in the Children's Zoo is a great place to talk about how North American species utilize the forests around us. From iconic species like eagles, and familiar ones like deer and raccoons, to animals you didn't even realize needed trees – like porcupines! This area is a prime location to tell the story about how everything is connected

Herpetology Building

This building is home to many species of reptiles and amphibians who depend on trees and forested areas for survival. Salamander habitat is threatened by the harvesting of trees for disposable chopsticks (3.8 million trees a year!) The [Houston toad](#) is also a great topic to speak about as we actively participate in releasing captive bred toads into the wild.





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The Paper Problem

Paper is such a commonly used product; most consumers don't even realize how much it impacts our daily lives. For example, the average household uses 120 rolls of toilet paper per year! That's 1 roll every 3 days! 27,000 trees are cut down each day to provide toilet paper for the world. And that's just toilet paper. Think of all of the paper products you touch from the time you wake up until the time you go to bed! The trees cut down to make these products are home to the world's arboreal creatures – many species of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and arthropods all depend on trees for survival.

What the Houston Zoo is doing to help

- Our admission tickets are made from 100% recycled paper
- Zoo publications and newsletters are shared digitally
- Wipe for Wildlife Campaign – see the [video!](#)
- Support conservation partner [Proyecto Tití](#)
- Houston toad recovery project
- All sourced/purchased lumber is FSC certified
- Recycled wood used for signage, and theming

What our guests can to do help

- Just by coming to the zoo you are already helping to save animals in the wild!
- Use toilet paper made from recycled materials – you don't need to recycle your toilet paper!
- Purchase paper products made from recycled content
- Set aside paper products at home for recycling – most urban neighborhoods pick up paper recycling now! You can recycle things like cardboard packaging too (cereal boxes, etc)
- Do you really need to print that email, receipt, etc?
- Go paperless with your bills

For more information

- [Forest Stewardship Council](#)
- [Recycling in the Houston-Galveston area](#)
- [Earth 911 Guide to Paper Recycling](#)
- [Chopsticks for Salamanders](#)



Unless...

Speaking about trees often brings to mind the story of the Lorax and how nothing will get better unless there is someone who cares a *whole awful lot*. Caring for our trees and old growth rainforests will ensure plentiful ecosystems for wildlife and clean air for the world!

Trees are not only cut down for paper – some wood products are utilized for construction and furniture. There are choices you can make to be more environmentally friendly.

Some wood, especially hardwoods which grow back more slowly than softwoods, is harvested in unsustainable ways. Look for logos that say the wood is certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). If you can't find one, you can always inquire where the wood came from.

Try to avoid mahogany, Caribbean pine, teak, Spanish cedar, and rosewood. You can also look for wood substitutes such as bamboo or even salvaged or recycled wood!