
Northern Alabama Zoo: A Regional Attraction

Key Quotes from Canopy Strategic Partners' Feasibility Analysis

(Zoo Industry Experts: www.canopysp.com)

- “The North Alabama region is very likely to support a mid-sized zoological experience. Assuming a quality experience, we conservatively assess annual attendance to be within the 325,000 to 375,000 range.”
- “Assuming typical financial architecture and good management, the zoo is likely to be financially sustainable. We assess that it would likely run a small surplus of about \$500,000 (approx. a 6% margin) annually over the first five years of its operations.”
- “There are very few favorable markets remaining in the United States that are not already home to a zoo. Huntsville is one of them. We assess with high confidence that the concept under consideration is sustainable.”

Opportunity Overview

- **Strategic Opportunity:** The North Alabama region, with nearly 2 million residents within a 90-minute drive and 2.6 million overnight visitors annually, presents an attractive market for a mid-sized zoo.
- **Location Advantage:** Situated off I-65, the proposed site leverages high-volume corridors connecting Athens, Madison, Huntsville, Decatur, Birmingham, and even parts of Nashville, ensuring broad regional accessibility.

Financial Feasibility & Market Potential

- **Attendance Projections:** Conservatively with just a statistically average performance, the zoo is projected to welcome 350,000 visitors annually in its initial years. (Realistically approaching 413,000 - 480,000 visitors.)
- **Financial Sustainability:** With conservative yet realistic assumptions, an operation of average performance is expected to generate a small net surplus (around \$500,000 annually over the first five years), indicating a self-sustaining financial model.
- **Local Impact:** Job creation is forecasted through an employment model of approximately 49 full-time and 43 part-time direct positions, directly supporting the regional economy. Total economic impact of 650+ jobs and \$117 million (from *UAH Economic Impact Study*.)

Limestone County Benefits

- **Economic Development:** The project promises to boost tourism revenue and create jobs while fostering ancillary business growth and funding for improved local services.
- **Community Enrichment and Pride:** A new regional zoo will not only serve as a family-friendly attraction but also support hands-on STEM/STEAM educational programs and conservation efforts, enhancing the quality of life for residents in a multitude of ways.
- **Competitive Edge:** The absence of a zoo currently puts North Alabama at a disadvantage in competing for businesses and talent, as high-quality amenities (zoos and aquariums being primary ones) play a crucial role in regional desirability for moving here.

Conclusion

A thoughtfully designed and managed zoo in Northern Alabama represents a strategic investment for the community and the state—one that is economically viable, socially enriching, and positioned to become a lasting regional asset.