



Date posted: November 8, 2025

Pay: From \$90,000.00 per year

Job description:

Chief Operating Officer (COO)

Reports To: Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

Status: Full-Time, Exempt

Location: Wildlife Prairie Park, Hanna City, Illinois

Position Summary

Wildlife Prairie Park is an 1,800-acre zoological park near Peoria, Illinois, known as a Midwest gem, dedicated to conservation, education, and recreation since 1978. Home to over 180 animals across 60 native species—including bison, elk, black bears, wolves, and cougars—the Park also leads habitat restoration, land stewardship, and education efforts. Beyond its wildlife, the Park offers unique lodging, hosts weddings and corporate events, and provides year-round recreation, making it a treasured community asset and regional destination.

The Chief Operating Officer (COO) is a newly created role, serving as second-in-command and responsible for internal operations. The COO will work closely with the CEO to ensure alignment with the Park's mission and values, driving operational excellence through efficiency, consistency, and continuous improvement. A key priority is to establish and document systems and processes that support long-term sustainability.

By overseeing operations and collaborating with department directors, the COO will advance strategic goals, foster a high-performing and inclusive culture, support accreditation efforts, ensure fiscal and regulatory compliance, enhance guest experiences, and strengthen emergency preparedness.

Essential Duties and Responsibilities

Strategic Leadership & Planning

- Demonstrate independent decision-making and proactive execution while keeping the CEO informed.
- Exhibit proven leadership skills by motivating and guiding department directors, fostering accountability, and ensuring that team objectives align with goals and values.
- Lead project management efforts to ensure timely, on-budget delivery aligned with strategic goals.
- Provide regular updates and insights to the CEO, including meaningful metrics.
- Collaborate with leadership to implement strategic initiatives and prioritize expansion projects.
- Identify funding opportunities and assist with grant applications.

Operations & Facilities Oversight

- Lead daily operations to ensure coordination, effectiveness, and alignment with strategic objectives.
- Develop and execute operational plans for infrastructure, capital improvements, equipment, and land use.
- Establish and enforce policies, procedures, and protocols that promote consistency, safety, and regulatory compliance.
- Oversee procurement, contracts, inventory, and logistics.
- Coordinate cross-departmental efforts for events, facility upgrades, and emergency planning.
- Ensure compliance with USDA, IDNR, EPA, OSHA, and other applicable regulations.
- Manage maintenance schedules and vendor relationships.

Sustainability, Accountability & Financial Management

- Partner with the CEO and CFO on annual operating and capital budgets.
- Collaborate with the CEO and Chief Advancement Officer on revenue strategies across admissions, lodging, events, retail, education and donations.
- Promote environmental sustainability initiatives.
- Support performance management through timely feedback and coaching.
- Oversee internal audits and compliance reviews.
- Require regular departmental reporting on financials, KPIs, project milestones, and staff development.
- Ensure departments meet operational goals.
- Lead by example in cultivating a culture of accountability, collaboration, and continuous improvement across all departments.

Required Qualifications

- Bachelor's degree in business, public administration, nonprofit management, parks and recreation, or related field.
- Minimum 5 years of experience in operations, capital planning, and facilities management.
- Proven leadership experience managing diverse teams and driving measurable performance outcomes through accountability and consistent follow-up.
- Strong project management and organizational skills.
- Experience in nonprofits, hospitality, zoos, or public attractions preferred.
- Direct experience with capital projects and infrastructure upgrades.
- Proven financial acumen and budget oversight capabilities.
- Technologically adept and able to implement new systems.
- Flexible schedule, including evenings and weekends.
- Valid Illinois Driver's License.

Preferred Qualifications

- Master's degree or MBA in Facilities Management, Construction, Business, Parks Management, or Zoological Management.
- Experience with AZA/ZAA accreditation or equivalent standards.
- Background in conservation, eco-tourism, parks, or environmental education.
- Six Sigma, Lean, or other business optimization experience.
- PMP, PMI, or other project management certification.

Job Type: Full-time

Benefits:

- Dental insurance
- Employee assistance program
- Employee discount
- Health insurance
- Life insurance
- Paid time off
- Relocation assistance
- Retirement plan
- Vision insurance