Green Tales

ZOO-m Go Electric!

By Liz Larsen

This spring, Utah’s Hogle Zoo in Salt Lake City, Utah, teamed-up with a local non-profit, Utah Clean Energy, to improve local air quality by facilitating increased adoption of electric transportation. Poor air quality is a critical public policy issue to Utahan’s, second to health care. Consequently, Utah has started to make significant investments to develop a robust electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure with many charging stations projected for installation in the next few years, covering thousands of miles of roadways.

The ZOO-m Go Electric! program was a collaborative effort to secure discounted pricing for electric vehicles and electric bikes (e-bikes) for Zoo staff, members and guests. Keeping the program limited to six weeks focused our outreach resources while creating enthusiasm for participants to act quickly. Participants were able to view the discounts and final costs associated with a purchase or lease on a public website. This process helped to simplify the research and decision-making process for participants. All purchases were made directly with the participating dealerships and shops.

Participating dealerships and bike shops were selected through a competitive request for proposal process in five counties, representing the bulk of Zoo membership. Applications were evaluated on four main criteria: qualifications and expertise of staff, inventory, demonstrated ability to meet scope of work, and discount offered. Five dealerships and nine bike shops were selected for the program with car discounts of up to 25 percent and up to 45 percent on e-bikes—each make and model and associated costs were assembled in a spreadsheet for easy comparison.

A general employee meeting days prior to launch focused on informing and engaging Zoo staff in the program. Speakers discussed the Zoo’s plan to expand employee and guest charging stations, as well as the science behind energy, emissions and EV technology. The Zoo’s fleet LEAF and a Pedigo bike were on hand for staff to test.

Party for the Planet was a fitting event to launch the program—a day where we come together to celebrate wildlife and learn how we can protect and preserve our shared environment and to take action. Participating dealerships and bike shops were stationed throughout the Zoo with their EVs and e-bikes to talk to guests. Staff and media came together to test drive different models of e-bikes and were delightfully surprised at how much fun they were.

Two community workshops brought EV’s and e-bikes to different libraries, giving interested people an opportunity to learn more about the technology and talk with an EV owner and take test rides. Further promotion asked people to consider “joining the movement” and continued throughout the duration of the program through membership newsletters, on-site programming, staff and volunteer “ask-me” buttons, banners and restaurant table tents.

In just six weeks 66 new EV’s and E-bikes were purchased through ZOO-m Go Electric! Over the next five years, these vehicles will prevent over 64,000 gallons of gasoline from being burned—a significant reduction in local criteria air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Five staff members made the switch to an electric commuter car and there is a growing interest from other staff members. Staff is encouraged to use the Zoo’s LEAF for around-town errands and to test drive. We hope it will encourage other staff to adopt the technology.

This program was a great opportunity for the Zoo to showcase its commitment to wildlife conservation by taking care of our environment while making a positive change for the community. Plans for a repeat program are underway.

Liz Larsen is the director of conservation at Utah’s Hogle Zoo.