



Design Invitation:

Second Nature

DESIGNING A VENUE FOR A SPECIES' ENCORE

You start to feel a quiet sense of anticipation as you walk to the edge of the ecological reserve. The land stretches, literally, in all directions. It's vast in its width, but it stretches vertically too. The changes in topography are dramatic. Not long from now, and not far from where you're standing, visitors will get to experience a creature that previously existed only in history books. You carefully examine the landscape, searching for the perfect location.

The Executive Director of the Department of ReCreation approaches. He's engaging, and speaks with the perfect combination of passion and gravitas. You first met him during the interview to win this project, and you instantly thought he'd be a perfect character in a movie. Reflecting back, you think that maybe if this project is successful, someone might make one.

Gazing over the landscape, he starts speaking, "There it is. It's beautiful, isn't it? We spent years trying to find the perfect place. More importantly, we've spent billions of dollars on decades of research and experimentation to get to the point where we can finally unveil our first species. Now that we've almost reached the finish line, we're putting our success in your hands. We're almost ready to bring this species back to life, but we need you to bring the visitors' experience to life. This building must be designed in a way to allow people to truly connect with the animal. They need to understand it from multiple viewpoints, see all its majesty, in all of its habitats. They must appreciate how it was once part of a larger ecosystem, and what caused it to go extinct. We've created the art. But, we need you to make the perfect frame."

"Are you trying to make sure I feel pressured to make this building exceptional?" You knowingly grin.

"Yes." He smiles. "It's not just important for me, or just for the Department of ReCreation investors, it's important for all of humanity. You're designing the interface, the delivery system, to present this species, and the story of its extinction to the public."

The importance of the project starts to wash over you. "Well... It worked." You exhale. "I won't let you down."

"This project isn't just about selling tickets for entertainment." He continues. "We're building an experience center. This is an opportunity to teach the world what a second chance truly means."

View: A Lesson on an Architectural Concept

Architectural design in institutions such as zoos and museums fundamentally revolves around spatial choreography, the deliberate orchestration of movement, sight lines, and experiential sequences that guide visitors through a narrative journey. In zoos, this often takes the form of landscape immersion techniques, where paths wind through recreated habitats with controlled reveals and hidden distractions. These strategies sequentially choreograph emotional connections to animals and nature. Not only does this make exhibits psychologically more engaging, it also helps with pacing and the distribution of crowds. Just as a movie contains a variety of parts, moods, and tempos, spatial experiences can be intentionally varied as well.

Ultimately, this choreographic approach transforms static spaces into dynamic scripts. Architecture directs human movement like a dance, enhancing education, emotion, and connection in cultural and conservation-focused environments.

Architectural design for nature centers often prioritizes views out of the building as a core principle. By intentionally framing the surrounding landscape, architecture can dissolve boundaries between interior spaces and the natural world, fostering deeper environmental awareness and restorative connections.

Strategically placed openings, expansive windows, cantilevered overlooks, and carefully oriented sightlines direct visitors' gazes toward key ecological features such as wetlands, forests, or wildlife habitats. In doing so, the building itself becomes a viewing platform that enhances education and immersion, much like national park visitor centers that frame panoramic vistas to orient and inspire.

This focus on outward views reinforces the center's mission by making the outdoors the primary "exhibit" and encouraging occupants to engage actively with the environment beyond the walls.

Successful architecture in these environments is much less about "look at me" and much more about "look at that."



Site

The experience center and the animal's enclosure will be located on a site of your choice within an 88-acre ecological reserve. The reserve contains multiple habitats: rocky cliffs, rivers, shoreline, grasslands, forests, and of course the open sky. Each entrant will choose an extinct animal from the list below, then select a 5.7 acre (250,000 square feet) zone as your fenced enclosure. This will be your animal's new home. The fenced enclosure should contain both of your animal's habitat requirements. Your experience center can either be inside or outside of your fenced enclosure. As you're selecting your building's location, consider opportunities to harmonize the building and the terrain, and take advantage of natural features such as elevation changes, vegetation density, or proximity to the waterline.

It's not a problem if your fenced enclosure contains more habitats than your animal needs, but you should aim to provide as much suitable habitat as possible to support your animal. Identifying the exact delineation of a zone on a three-dimensional surface is difficult. We expect a reasonable effort to be made to properly include the correct zones. We will not make precise measurements of the site plan to judge the entries.

There are not currently roads in the ecological reserve. You have enough to design already. Creating roads and parking is not required. Your visitors can travel to and from your experience center in any way you wish: a passenger car on a road, an all-terrain vehicle on a trail, drone, boat, helicopter, teleportation, etc. are all acceptable.

A site plan, section, and habitat map is attached near the end of this document. A 3D site model, in Revit and Sketchup file formats, are available for download from IHSADC.com.

Select Your Species

Pick one of the species below to become the focus of your experience center. The two habitats your animal requires should be located within your fenced enclosure. It is not necessary to "enclose" the skies.

SPECIES	HABITAT #1	HABITAT #2
Caribbean Monk Seal	Shoreline	Water
Dodo	Shoreline	Forest
Elephant Bird	Grassland	Forest
Giant Ground Sloth	Grassland	Forest
Great Auk	Rocky Cliffs	Water
Haast's Eagle	Rocky Cliffs	Forest & Skies
Passenger Pigeon	Skies	Forest
Tasmanian Tiger	Grassland	Forest

Program Requirements

Your task is to design an experience center that provides two distinct views of your selected species - one for each habitat where the species naturally moves, feeds, or shelters. The goal is to help visitors understand the full perspective of the animal, and see it in two habitats. In addition to viewing areas, the experience center will have visitor education, research space, and veterinary care for your selected species.

Required Areas

The following is the list of rooms and spaces you should include in your design. Required areas or dimensions are shown in brackets. Where not listed, the size of each room can be as small or large as necessary to fit the listed furniture and equipment. **Don't give into the temptation to oversize rooms.** Carefully consider the placement of furniture and equipment to design functional and efficient spaces. Rooms are not required to be closed off from one another. Consider light, views, and circulation when placing interior walls. The total square footage (all indoor space) of each design will be used as a criterion for judging and



therefore must be written on each board in ½" tall letters (minimum). Total square footage, however, is not the sole criterion. Thoughtful, creative design solutions will ultimately be more successful than submissions which are unimaginative yet efficient.

Habitat [Exterior Fenced Enclosure, 250,000sf]

Refer to the habitat map and select a zone of 250,000 square feet that contains both habitats for your selected animal. A square of the appropriate size is shown for reference, but your zone is not required to be square. Your selected area will be your animal's new home. It is not necessary to focus on the details of the fence. Assume that flying animals will return home, and that underwater "fencing" works.

Public Spaces

The public spaces below will educate visitors in the experience center. One of the most consequential decisions an architect makes in a building of this type is choosing the order of the spaces a visitor will experience. Consider how each space builds on the other and forms a complete experience for your visitor. The experience should build up from the very first room they enter to the "grand finale" that makes a lasting impression.

Lobby & Ticketing [Size as Necessary]

This will be the first space your visitors experience. It should be welcoming and exciting. Visitors should be contained in this zone until they purchase a ticket and enter the building.

Reception and Ticketing Desk [100sf]

☐ Desk [10'-0" wide x 2'-6" deep]

The ticketing area should accommodate two staff, two computers, and a small amount of storage drawers.

Exhibit Hall [3,000sf]

This is a museum zone dedicated to exhibits about the animal such as: its history, the cause of its extinction, its skeleton, its lifecycle, and the process of bringing the animal back from extinction. The primary purpose of this area is to educate visitors about the animal, especially those things that can't be directly observed. It will house graphic displays, projections and physical artifacts. Designing specific exhibits is not required, but illustrate where exhibits will be located, and the circulation path through the space.

☐ Eight (8) Display Zones [minimum]

Identify locations for at least eight different display zones. These can be of any size and scale for displays of any type. Locating these zones will define the circulation through the exhibit hall.

Media Room/Theater

This is a multi-function theater. Most of the time, this space will show a short film about the animal. However, it will also host special events like guest lectures, fundraising events, scientific research presentations, movie nights, and panel discussions.

Stage [30' wide x 15' Deep]

The back side of the stage will have a movie screen, where films will be shown to the audience. For live events, the stage will host speakers and panelists and should be clearly visible to the audience. The stage can be elevated, but it is not required.

☐ Projection Screen [26' Wide x 14'6" High]. This is the screen where movies will be shown. It should be along the back wall of the stage.

☐ Stage Entrance Door – This door should allow a speaker to enter the stage from the side. It can come from a hallway or a back room.

Seating [1,200sf]

☐ 100 Seats arranged in a fixed Theater Layout

Arrange your seats so they have a good view of the stage, and all seats are accessible to visitors. Seating can be on either a sloped or flat floor.



Experience Zones – These are the foundational spaces of the experience center. This is where visitors will watch and understand how the animal lives in each of its habitats. Carefully consider their placement to allow the best view and experience for each habitat. Design this space in any way you see fit to deliver the perfect experience. This space is not required to be inside the animal's habitat. They need to be accessible from the experience center, but the connection is not required to be enclosed.

Habitat #1 Experience Zone [Size to accommodate 20 people]

This space should allow a view and experience of the animal in habitat #1

Habitat #2 Experience Zone [Size to accommodate 20 people]

This space should allow a view and experience of the animal in habitat #2

Restrooms [Size as Necessary]

Restrooms should be easily accessible but should not be in everyone's direct view. Consider locating them in an alcove, down a hallway, or around a corner.

Men's

- ☐ One (1) Handicapped Accessible Stall Minimum 5'-0" Deep x 5'-0" Wide
- ☐ Two (2) Standard Stalls Minimum 5'-0" Deep x 3'-0" Wide
- ☐ Three (2) Sinks mounted in a countertop
- ☐ Two (2) Urinals 1'-3" Deep x 1'-6" Wide

Women's

- ☐ One (1) Handicapped Accessible Stall Minimum 5'-0" Deep x 5'-0" Wide
- ☐ Three (3) Standard Toilet Stalls Minimum 4'-8" Deep x 3'-0" Wide
- ☐ Three (3) Sinks mounted in a countertop

Support Spaces

The spaces below are the "back-of-house" or "behind the scenes" spaces. These are critical for the building to function, but will not be accessed by the public. Consider how these spaces can be separated from the public experience, but are located to still effectively perform their functions.

Veterinary Suite

These spaces form a small suite of spaces that provide veterinary care for the animal. While they shouldn't be publicly accessible, some of the activities in these spaces may be of interest to the public. You may consider adding viewing windows, a gallery, display monitors, etc. to allow for observation.

Habitat Transfer / Holding / Recovery Room [500sf]

This space must connect directly to the animal's habitat. This is where animals will be held to be sedated, and brought into the veterinary suite, and also where they'll fully recover before re-entering their outdoor habitat.

- ☐ One (1) Veterinary Entrance Door – This door connects the examination and treatment room. Size the door for a person or your animal - whichever is larger.
- ☐ One (1) Habitat Entrance Door – This door connects directly to the animal's habitat. Size this door for a person or your animal - whichever is larger.

Examination & Treatment Room [Size as Necessary]

This is the animal's primary veterinary exam and treatment space.

- ☐ One (1) Examination / Treatment Table [Size to Fit your Animal]
- ☐ One (1) Cabinets and Countertop for storage and prep [2' Deep x 8' Long, 36" High]
- ☐ One (1) Handwashing sink. Can be integrated in counter or stand alone.



Birthing Room [Size based on Options Below]

This is an interior habitat where pregnant animals will be kept in order to safely give birth, or where eggs will be placed in an incubator to hatch. This space should be sized appropriately for your animal, but does not need to be excessively large. Assume pregnant animals move very little, and spend most of their time sleeping and eating.

☐ Animal Habitat [600sf to 3,600sf] This space is required for all mammals. Size it appropriately to house your animal.
OR

Egg Incubator Room [250sf] This space is required for all birds

☐ Egg Incubator [5'x5']

Research Lab [800sf]

This space will house research into the animals and their genetics. It will also support the veterinary staff in diagnosing medical issues with the animals.

☐ Four (4) Laboratory Workbenches [2' Deep x 8' Long, 36" High Counter]

This space will support research. Researchers will sit on lab stools and use tabletop microscopes, spectrophotometers, centrifuges and DNA sequencers on the counters.

☐ Two (2) Writing and Digital Research Stations [2' Deep x 6' Long, 30" High Counter]

This is a basic desk and computer for researchers to write papers, and perform basic office functions.

☐ One (1) Fume Hood [2' Deep x 5' Long]

This is an enclosed cabinet with an exhaust that allows researchers to safely work with dangerous chemicals.

Private Offices [4 @ 150sf Each]

The executive director, operations managers, lead researcher and chief veterinarian all need offices to do their work and have private conversations. This is where they'll get their work done. The private offices should be out of the way, in a quiet location.

☐ Four (4) Offices each 150sf

☐ One (1) Desk with an office chair

☐ Two (2) Side Chairs for visitors

☐ One (1) Bookshelf 1'-0" Deep x 4'-0" Wide

Research

Architects do not start from scratch when they begin a new project. They start by researching what others have done on similar projects. Before you begin designing, we strongly encourage you to do some research. You should look at dual-habitat animal enclosures at zoos (polar bears, penguins, primates) nature education centers, and environmentally integrated architecture. You can also learn about circulation, visitor experience, and public/private separation from museums dedicated to most topics. You're also encouraged to research the specific animal you select—its behaviors, movement patterns, sensory abilities, and natural history. Finally, do presentation research. For all your hard work to be understood by the judges, it's **critical** that your work is displayed clearly and legibly. Try searching for "architectural design competition entry board."

Recommended Drawings

The drawings below are the minimum required drawings. You are free to add drawings as you see fit. The scales below are the minimum recommended scales. Consider increasing the size of your most dramatic or impressive drawing. Effective use of color, shade, and shadows on elevations, perspectives, and axonometric drawings can greatly enhance your presentation. Computer generated graphics are acceptable but not mandatory. Produce drawings with the method you feel most comfortable using for the best results. Remember to pick views that best describe your design to the judges!

You are **strongly** encouraged to design your presentation board before actually producing final drawings. This will help focus your time developing the most important drawings and allow you to choose the correct size and scale of your final images.

☐ One Perspective or Axonometric drawing of the building's Exterior. This is likely to be the first drawing judges will look at to get an overall impression of your design. Choose this view wisely. (Don't forget shadows!)

☐ One Perspective or Axonometric drawing of an interior space. This is likely to be the second drawing judges will look at to get an overall impression of your design. Choose this view wisely. (Don't forget shadows!)



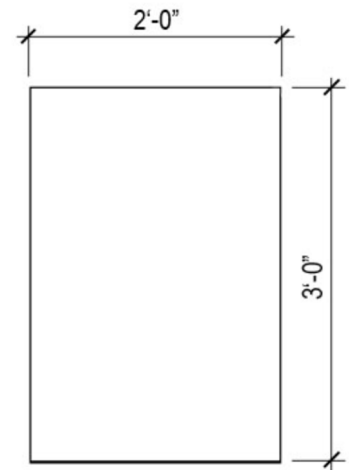
- ☐ One Site Plan (Scale to fit) This plan should clearly illustrate where your building and fenced enclosure are located within the nature reserve. This drawing will need to be at a very very small scale, so don't try to make it show too much.
- ☐ One Habitat Plan (1" = 200')
- ☐ One Floor Plan per floor (1/16" = 1'-0")
- ☐ Two Exterior Elevations (1/16" = 1'-0") **OR** Two Exterior Perspectives of Different Views of the Building
- ☐ One Building Section (1/16" = 1'-0")

Concept Statement

Communication is a fundamental component of design. The ability to communicate both graphically and verbally are equally important in conveying your design ideas, therefore, a written concept statement is required. Your concept statements should describe your ideas, thought process, and intentions. Your concept statement is a verbal attempt of persuading the judges why your design ideas stand out from the other entrants. An entry with a well-written concept statement will win a tie between two boards with equally strong designs and graphics. The statement may include small sketches, symbols, etc. as necessary. Be careful not to confuse a long concept statement with a good concept statement. A short, concise, and informative statement is more powerful than a lengthy one. Don't forget to check your spelling.

Presentation Board Requirements

- Each entrant must submit their entry on one 24" x 36" (total board size) foam core board. Entries mounted on boards which are not 24" x 36" will likely be disqualified. All boards will be displayed with the long dimension on the vertical axis (as shown to the right).
- Include the total square footage (all indoor space) of the design in 1/2" tall letters on the front of the board.
- To the back of the entry board, tape an **UNSEALED** envelope. This is the container for your entry form. Inside the envelope, place a completed copy of the entry form (found at the end of this document. An interactive PDF is also available at ihsadc.com). The email address written on the entry form will be used for notification of your status in the competition. Please print clearly.
- Write your initials at the top-center of the back of the board in permanent ink.
- Do not write your full name or school identification anywhere on the presentation board. This may disqualify your entry.
- Presentations may be drawn directly on the board or on separate sheet(s) securely mounted to the board.
- We discourage the use of temporary spray-on adhesives. Drawings attached with temporary adhesive will detach from the board and are likely to be damaged. Neither the Competition Committee nor the Judges will be responsible for drawings that do not adhere to the presentation boards.
- The use of tacks is prohibited.
- Any presentation that does not conform to the presentation requirements is subject to disqualification.



Competition Schedule

February 21 st , 2026 at 10:30 am	Design Workshop , at American Structurepoint. 9025 River Road, Suite 200, Indianapolis, IN 46240
March 27 th , 2026 by 5 pm	Entry Boards Due at CSO Architects' Headquarters. Entries are accepted prior to this date. 8831 Keystone Crossing, Indianapolis, IN 46240
April 10 th , 2026	Notification emailed to all Teachers and Entrants of standing in the competition
May 8 th , 2026 at 8pm	Awards Ceremony at the Indianapolis Artsgarden.
July 3 rd , 2026	Last Day for Board Pickup at CSO Architects' Headquarters. Entries will be available during business hours prior to this date.



Qualifications for Entry

Entrant must be a high school student in the state of Indiana.

Design Workshop

The competition committee will host a design workshop for all competition entrants, their parents, and teachers on Saturday, February 21st from 10:30am to 2:30pm at American Structurepoint's headquarters (9025 River Road, Suite 200, Indianapolis, IN 46240). The competition committee will teach a short course on architectural design, discuss architecture as a career, and give a tour of the office. Lunch will be provided. Students are invited to bring their ideas, sketches, and presentation board mock-ups to discuss their designs with Indiana architects and designers. However, students are not required to bring work. The competition committee will not be available for competition entry design feedback, in order to remain impartial during the first round of judging. Attendance is not mandatory. If you are interested in joining us, please RSVP the number of people attending to IHSADC@AIAindiana.org by January 30th. RSVPs are not mandatory, but preferred. We hope to see you there!

Entry Deadline

Boards may be mailed or delivered in person. Entries will be accepted on any day during business hours until:

March 27th, 2026 at 5 pm
CSO Architects headquarters
8831 Keystone Crossing
Indianapolis, IN 46240

Judging

The first round of judging is performed by the Indiana High School Architectural Design Competition Committee. The second round of judging is performed by a combination of the presidents of each of the four Indiana Chapters of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), professional Indiana architects, and Architecture Professors from Ball State University, Indiana University, and the University of Notre Dame.

The following criteria will be used to evaluate the entries:

CREATIVITY, Design Quality, Presentation, Concept Statement, Overall Square Footage of the Design, Adherence to Program Requirements (i.e., presentation board size, square footages, required areas)

Variance from the listed criteria is at the entrant's own risk. Judges reserve the right to award a prize to an entrant that does not follow the recommended drawing list but is able to communicate a creative design idea through a high-quality presentation. Judges also reserve the right to disqualify noncompliant entries. All decisions of the judges are final.

The first round of judging will determine the 72 students whose boards are awarded the distinction of being displayed in the Indianapolis Artsgarden. These boards are automatically eligible for the second round of judging. Winners will be posted on the website after the ceremony.

Awards and Ceremony

The awards ceremony will be held on May 8th, 2026 at 8pm in the Indianapolis Artsgarden. All entrants, parents, and teachers are invited to attend. In addition to announcing winners, the ceremony will feature an Indiana architect designing a competition entry live on stage. The architect will explain their process as their design comes to life. After the formal ceremony, students, parents, and teachers are encouraged to speak with the architects in attendance and receive personalized feedback from judges and the competition committee. The ceremony will last approximately 90 minutes. News outlets may be in attendance.



3 Awards of Excellence

\$500 Prize, \$500 Scholarship to a Summer Architecture Program, Award Certificate

5 Awards of Honor

\$250 Prize, Award Certificate

Judge's Distinction (Quantity determined by Judges)

Award Certificate

Return of Boards

Participants who attend the awards ceremony may take their boards home following the ceremony. For those unable to attend, the boards will be available until July 3rd at CSO Architects office (8831 Keystone Crossing Indianapolis, IN 46240). All remaining boards will be recycled after this time.

Question and Answer Process

Please feel free to contact us via email with any questions. Your question will be answered with a direct email response as well as posted on the website. The website will be updated with questions and answers. Should you not receive a prompt reply to your emailed question, please feel free to ask the question again to ensure our receipt of the email.

Email Address

IHSADC@AIAindiana.org

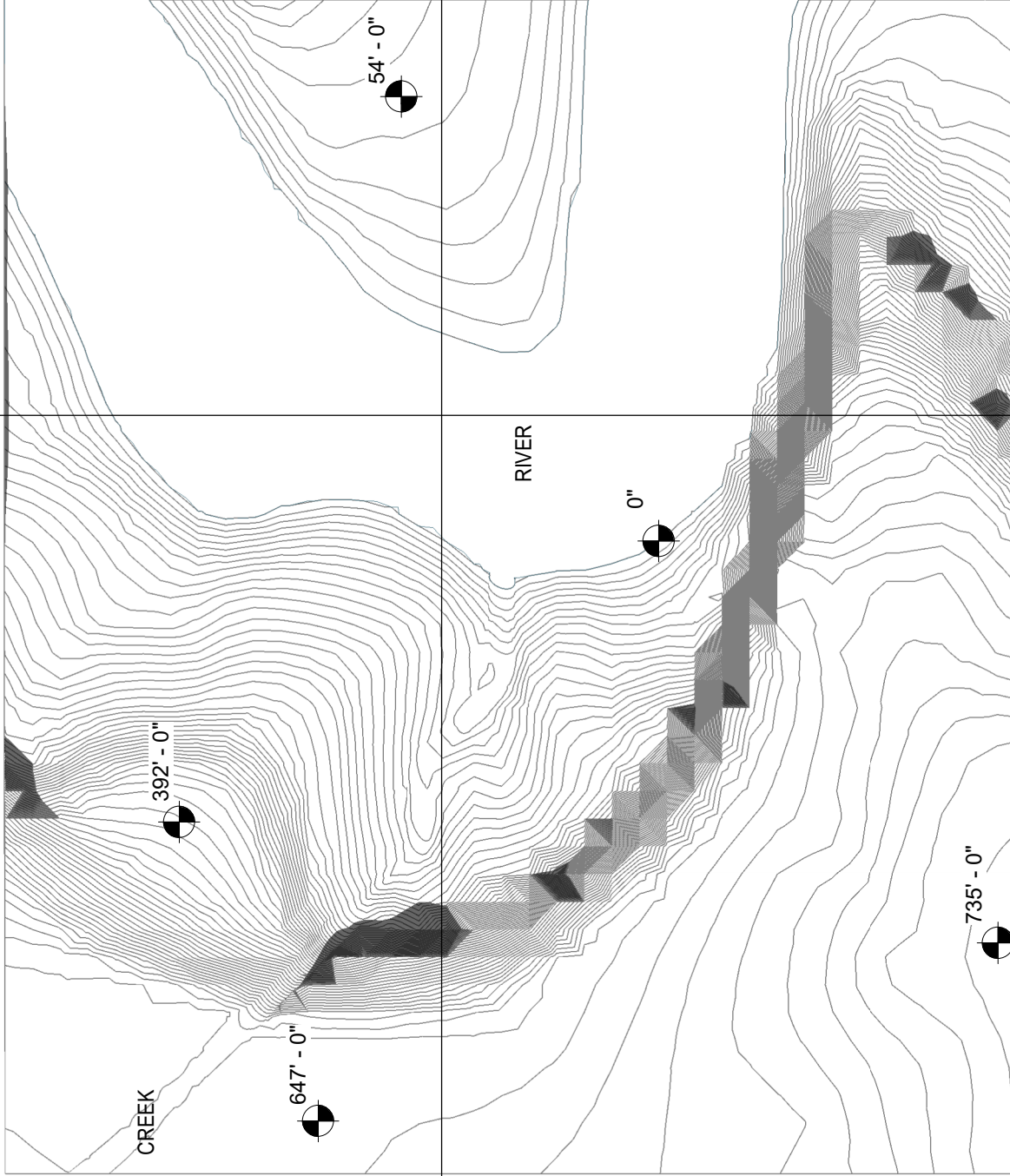
Follow us on Instagram and Facebook for updates, hints, tips, and pictures from previous competitions and awards ceremonies

@aia_ihsadc

www.facebook.com/ihsadc

We look forward to seeing your design entry! Have Fun and Good Luck! Remember, Creativity Sells!

End of program. Beginning of adventure...



1
A004

2
A004

N
1
A001
SITE PLAN

1" = 300'-0"

Area of
250,000sf
Fenced Enclosure

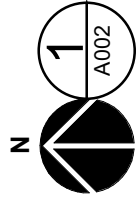
(Area Shown for Reference.
Proportions can be Changed)

Midwestern Climate Zone



SECOND NATURE

2026 Indiana High School Architectural Design Competition
American Institute of Architects - Indiana
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HABITAT PLAN

1" = 300'-0"

Area of
250,000sf
Fenced Enclosure
(Shown for Reference.
Proportions can be Changed)





1 SITE AXON

N.T.S.

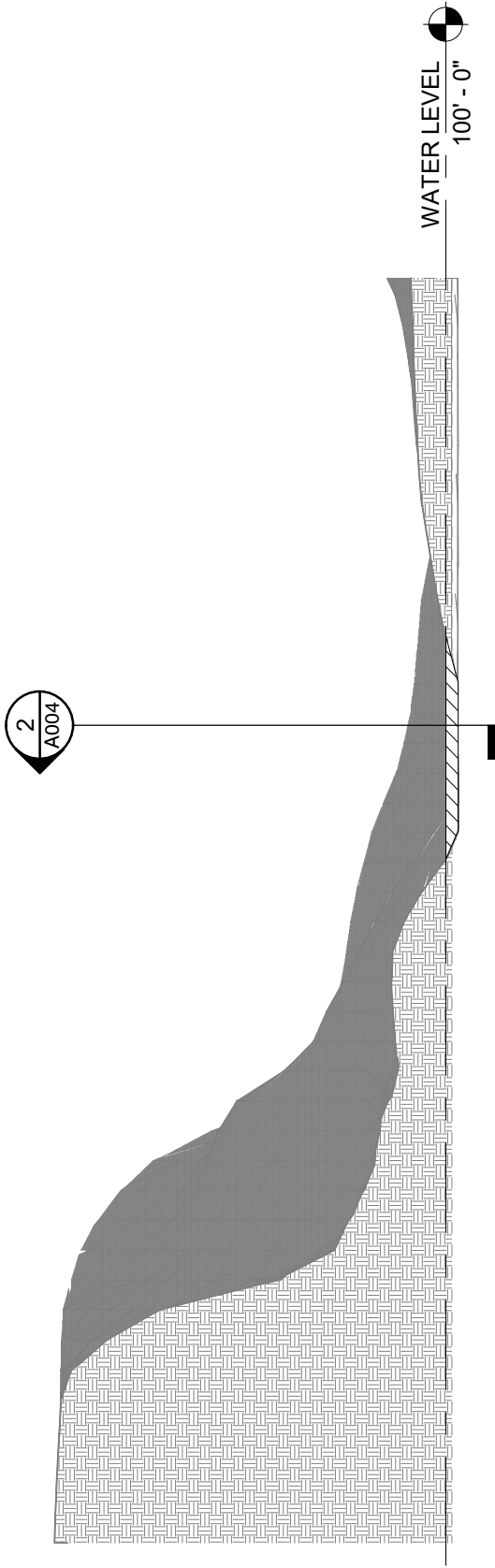
A003

Midwestern Climate Zone



SECOND NATURE

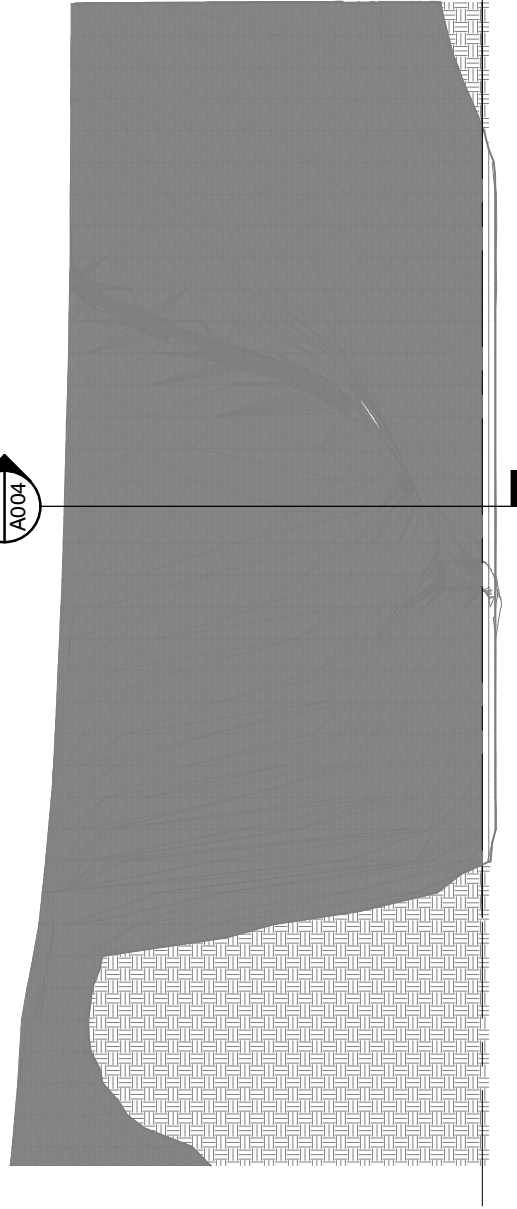
2026 Indiana High School Architectural Design Competition
American Institute of Architects - Indiana
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1 E/W Site Section

1" = 300'-0"

1
A004



2 N/S Site Section

1" = 300'-0"

2
A004

Midwestern Climate Zone



SECOND NATURE

2026 Indiana High School Architectural Design Competition
American Institute of Architects - Indiana
IHSADC.com



Second Nature – Student Design Cheat Sheet

A Guide to Getting Started and Staying on Track

Design competitions can feel overwhelming at first. This cheat sheet is meant to help you break the project into manageable steps, understand what matters most, and keep moving forward with confidence.

1. Start by Understanding the Problem

Before drawing anything, slow down and read the program carefully. This year's challenge is not just about designing a building, but about designing an experience. Choose your species early and research how large it is, how it moves, eats, and interacts with its habitat. Your design should reflect those behaviors. Ask yourself:

- What is this building meant to *teach*?
- Who is the visitor, and what do they see first?
- How does architecture shape the way people understand the animal and its environment?

2. Think About Site and Perspective

The site is not a blank canvas. It has terrain, water, vegetation, and views. Choose an appropriate zone for your animal's enclosure, then decide where your building belongs and *why* it belongs there.

- Do visitors approach the building directly, or discover it gradually?
- Are they looking down into habitats, across them, or up at them?
- When you are inside looking out, what are you looking at?

3. Start Inside and Work Out: Organize the Experience Before Designing the Building

Don't start with room sizes. Start with sequence and arrange groups of spaces. Save the fine details until the spaces are correct. Imagine walking through your building as a visitor. Sketch diagrams showing movement, pauses, and transitions. Once the experience makes sense, the building will too.

- What happens first? What comes next?
- Where is the most memorable moment?

4. Develop the Building to Support the Idea: Begin Shaping Spaces and Forms

Your building does not need to be complicated, but it should be thoughtful. Clear ideas are more powerful than crowded drawings.

- Let the concept guide your layout.
- Group public, private, and support spaces logically.
- Use daylight, views, and circulation intentionally.

5. Draw to Communicate, Not to Decorate. Judges Can Only Evaluate What They Understand.

Design your presentation board *before* final drawings so you know what information matters most.

- Explain your idea in your concept statement. Choose drawings that best explain your idea.
- Make sure plans, sections, and perspectives are easy to read, and work together.
- Use drawings to show experience, not just geometry.

6. Keep Asking Yourself These Questions

- What is the main idea of my design?
- How does my building relate to the land?
- How does it change the way visitors see the animal?
- Does every drawing help explain my concept?

Final Advice

There is no single correct solution. The strongest entries are clear, intentional, and personal. Take risks, trust your ideas, and remember that architecture is about how people experience space. Good luck, and enjoy the process!

