

PRESS RELEASE

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Zoo loses elderly river otter

SEATTLE—For the past couple of decades, a female river otter named Salishan enchanted visitors with her energetic diving, gliding and cuteness. Today, March 5, Woodland Park Zoo humanely euthanized the 19-year-old otter following a period of declining health and lethargy. She was fondly called “Sunny” by her keepers.

River otters live 8 to 10 years in the wild and 18 to 20 years in zoos.

The zoo's consulting veterinary cardiologist, Dr. Jerry Woodfield with Northwest Cardiology Consultants, diagnosed the otter a year ago with age-related congestive heart failure. She was given a prognosis of three to six months to live but survived another 12 months.

“Targeted treatment, close monitoring, excellent supportive care, and lots of TLC by our keeper and veterinary staff all contributed to giving Salishan a very good quality of life for the past year,” said Dr. Kelly Helmick, Woodland Park Zoo's associate veterinarian. “Rarely do we get to successfully manage heart disease like hers for so long and for so well.”

As a standard procedure, the zoo's animal health team performed a necropsy (an animal autopsy), which confirmed congestive heart failure.

Salishan and her brother were rescued on Bainbridge Island after being observed without a mother and arrived at Woodland Park Zoo in 1996 at approximately 2 months old. A second grade class at North Beach Elementary named the siblings through a naming contest.

Salishan lived in the award-winning Northern Trail exhibit with her male companion, 17-year-old Duncan, the zoo's surviving otter. “For two decades Salishan showed off her superior swimming skills, playing with Duncan underwater and on land. Children especially loved trying to keep up with her at the viewing window. We will really miss her,” said Dr. Jennifer Pramuk, a curator at Woodland Park Zoo. The zoo is planning to acquire a new female and male river otter from other zoos in the next few months. “We look forward to introducing these new otter residents to our community.”

[North American river otters](#) are amphibious members of the weasel family. Their habitat ranges over most of North America in coastal areas, estuaries, freshwater lakes, streams and rivers. Otters prey on what is readily available and easiest to catch, with a primary diet of fish, crayfish, amphibians and birds.

All otter species are considered threatened while five of the 13 species are endangered due to water pollution, overfishing of commercial stock and habitat destruction. To help Woodland Park Zoo contribute information to the captive breeding, husbandry and public awareness of the river otter, adopt the species through the zoo's [ZooParent](#) program.

Visit www.zoo.org or call 206.548.2500 for information about Woodland Park Zoo.

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