

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release | July 23, 2013
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Zoo conservation and education programs essential to elephant survival

SEATTLE—We can't save elephants – or other endangered species – without involving people in wildlife conservation and a sustainable world, acknowledged Dr. Fred Koontz, vice president of field conservation at Woodland Park Zoo. Koontz said the role of zoos is essential to learning about animals and their habitats and how to save them.

Testimony from the Woodland Park Zoo executive was presented yesterday to an Elephant Task Force convened by the zoo's board of directors to provide community advice and guidance about the future of the zoo's elephant exhibit. Koontz and Jamie Creola, the zoo's vice president of education, spoke to the task force about the conservation and education impacts of Woodland Park Zoo's elephant program on the community and across the world. The task force has been meeting monthly and is scheduled to issue a report in the fall.

Koontz and Creola said that the zoo's elephants are key to conservation and education programs that help motivate the public to save them.

"With more than one million visitors annually and 114 years of animal expertise, Woodland Park Zoo is well-positioned to make a measurable difference in wildlife conservation and sustainable living," Koontz said. "Saving wildlife and creating a sustainable world is all about people. It is the responsibility of places like Woodland Park Zoo to educate the community to see the value in saving elephants and to work more fully with elephant range countries to conserve these animals; and we are already working in that direction."

Koontz also said that preventing extinction of Asian and African elephants will require increased protection against poaching for ivory and bushmeat, minimizing conflict between elephants and humans and protecting habitat through large-scale land-use planning.

"It is the responsibility of wealthier countries – and places like Seattle – to work more fully with elephant countries and their governments to manage elephants for conservation," he said.

Each year, the Association of Zoos & Aquariums provides [\\$160 million to wildlife conservation](#). In 2013, Woodland Park Zoo will contribute about \$1.5 million to field conservation projects in the Pacific Northwest and around the world, and our nine international Partners for Wildlife, including two projects for African and Asian elephants.

In his remarks, Koontz noted that because of agricultural expansion and illegal ivory trade on the rise in Africa, the survival of African elephants worsens each day. The Wildlife Conservation Society's Tarangire Elephant Project in Northern Tanzania works to protect wildlife by establishing conservation zones, employing local game scouts for monitoring the area, and training Tanzanian scientists to sustain long-term conservation of African elephants.

With the help of Woodland Park Zoo and conservation supporters, the Tarangire Elephant Project increased their game scout unit from 10 staffers to 30 in two years and developed several new Wildlife Management Areas to further expand conservation lands. Similarly, Hutan, a grassroots organization in Malaysia is on a mission to build innovative community-based approaches to conserve Asian elephants on the island of Borneo. In supporting Hutan's work, Woodland Park Zoo invests in scientific research, wildlife protection, habitat restoration and community education to save the endangered species. As a result of these efforts, in June 2013 the Malaysian government increased the level of legal protection for elephants, including more severe consequences for poaching.



In her remarks, Creola said that education is the zoo's primary engagement tool to teaching visitors about how local conservation actions can make a difference in the wild. As much as 95 percent of science learning happens outside of formal classrooms, Creola noted, and zoos and aquariums and other informal-science institutions can become a foundation for lifelong science learning and an education center for the next generation of conservationists.

Creola noted that just seeing elephants on television won't do the trick.

"Visitors to all science and cultural organizations come for a very specific reason—to see the 'real' thing and to talk to the experts that research and care for them—whether it's original artwork, a fully articulated T-Rex, or a live elephant," said Creola. "There is no replacement for experiencing elephants firsthand. We want our visitors to share our empathy for the natural world, deepen their understanding about animals and habitats, and learn scientific and leadership skills necessary to become informed citizens and conservation stewards."

Woodland Park is one of six zoos in the United States that conducts on-site research about zoo experiences and other aspects of the role of the institution. Kathryn Owen, the zoo's education research supervisor, noted that multiple studies conducted at Woodland Park Zoo have shown that seeing, hearing, and experiencing elephants are crucial because they bring the zoo's visitors face-to-face with the many dangers—including habitat loss, poaching and human-wildlife conflict—that threaten the species.

Research has shown that after listening to one of the regularly scheduled talks by elephant keepers, 83 percent of participants recalled learning about challenges facing wild elephants and could cite one or more threats. More than half of the visitors surveyed could recall conservation messages from the program in a follow-up survey one month later. By participating at the zoo's discovery stations and in sustainability activities, listening to daily keeper talks, or learning about the zoo's ongoing conservation projects, visitors of Woodland Park Zoo are no longer spectators to conservation but participants making a measurable difference in wildlife conservation.

Accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums, award-winning Woodland Park Zoo is famed for pioneering naturalistic exhibits and setting international standards for zoos in animal care, conservation and education programs. Woodland Park Zoo is helping to save animals and their habitats in the Pacific Northwest and around the world. By inspiring people to care and act, Woodland Park Zoo is making a difference in our planet's future. For more information, visit www.zoo.org.

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