

PRESS RELEASE

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Editor note: Staff will be available for interviews March 28, 10:00 a.m.-noon. Call 206.548.2550 to make arrangements.

Woodland Park Zoo to expand elephant program and create all-Asian herd *\$1.5 to \$3 million commitment for improvements to exhibit and conservation*

SEATTLE—Woodland Park Zoo (WPZ) announced today that over the next five years, the zoo will commit \$1.5 to \$3 million to strengthen the Asian elephant program and increase the number of Asian elephants at the zoo, as well as play a key role in multiple elephant conservation arenas.

Approved this week by the WPZ Board of Directors, the zoo's pledge follows a six-month, critical and thorough external review of its elephant program by the Elephant Task Force—a panel of local community representatives and internationally-distinguished scientists and animal care professionals—and a review of the Task Force's report by the zoo's Board and staff.

The new strategic direction of the zoo's elephant program endorses many of the options given to the zoo by the Elephant Task Force, plus additional information regarding the zoo's elephants, elephant conservation and education efforts. Key elements of the program entail:

- Focusing the zoo's Elephant Forest exhibit on the highly endangered Asian elephant species and growing the zoo's program to support and implement the goals of the Species Survival Plan (SSP) for Asian elephants, which is managed by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA). To this end, WPZ staff has initiated the process of working with AZA institutions to identify Asian elephants that can join Woodland Park Zoo and is optimistic about adding to the herd in the near future.
- Making significant improvements to the Elephant Forest exhibit and facilities.
- Playing an active role in the Wildlife Conservation Society's international *96 Elephants* conservation campaign: securing effective U.S. moratorium laws on ivory sales and bolstering elephant protection with additional advocacy funding; and educating the public about the devastating effects of the ivory trade.
- Increasing the zoo's commitment to Asian elephant conservation with our partner organizations in range countries.
- Developing enhanced guest experiences and educational programming in the Elephant Forest exhibit, allowing guests to interact with the zoo's elephants and staff, and learning how they can make an impact in elephant conservation.
- Providing leadership to the next phase of AZA elephant welfare research and applied practices.

"The zoo's board and staff have invested months into carefully deliberating the findings of the Elephant Task Force, designing a vision that serves the best interests of each of our elephants and that helps ensure a future for elephants in zoos and in the wild. The Woodland Park Zoo board is so committed to advancing the elephant program that the board unanimously approved committing \$500,000 to immediately put the plan in motion and make this vision a reality," said Board Chair Nancy Pellegrino. This first phase of funding will be used to launch design planning on the exhibit and enhance conservation efforts focusing most immediately on the illegal ivory crisis.

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Two female Asian elephants, 47-year-old Bamboo and 35-year-old Chai, and one female African, 45-year-old Watoto, currently live at the zoo.

“Since our strategic direction is now focused on Asian elephants, staff will begin formulating a plan to integrate Watoto, our one African elephant, into a herd at another AZA-accredited institution,” stated Dr. Nancy Hawkes, the zoo’s general curator.

While the zoo will focus its program on Asian elephants, it remains committed to preserving both African and Asian elephant species in the wild through field conservation partnerships. Woodland Park Zoo President and CEO Dr. Deborah Jensen stated that Woodland Park Zoo will bolster its advocacy by participating in the Wildlife Conservation Society’s *96 Elephants* campaign, named for the number of African elephants currently gunned down each day by poachers. The zoo will work with the *96 Elephants* campaign to stop the killing, stop the trafficking and stop the demand for ivory.

“Our vision is to make an impact on reducing human-elephant conflict in the world, ending the ivory trade, and inspiring a growing respect for sharing the planet with these awe-inspiring animals,” said Jensen. “Conserving wildlife is very complex, and we recognize that we can be a critical partner in carrying out the necessary actions to ensure a healthy future for the world’s elephants.”

Next steps include implementing a design process for physical improvements to the elephant exhibit to build on the physical and behavioral health, and social well-being of the animals, including: adding greater flexibility to how animals enter and exit the barn, increasing the diversity of surfaces in the yard and barn even more than current, installing timed feeders in the yards and barn, expanding enrichment opportunities, increasing the complexity of the yard, adding supplemental wind/rain shelters and outdoor heating, and upgrading barn cams to allow for 24-hour monitoring.

“I’m very pleased that the zoo board has made a strong commitment to saving Asian elephants both at the zoo and in the wild,” said Jan Hendrickson, co-chair of the Elephant Task Force.

More information will be shared with the community as the zoo moves forward in its expansion of the elephant program. “We are grateful to the community and the Elephant Task Force for their passion for elephants and diligence in helping us remain focused and committed to playing an important role in preserving elephants into the future,” said Jensen.

Elephants in Our Future

- Woodland Park Zoo has cared for elephants since it received its first elephant in 1921.
- Only 25,600 to 32,750 Asian elephants are estimated to remain in 13 range countries in South Asia and Southeastern Asia.
- In 1980, it was estimated there were 1.2 million African elephants. Throughout Africa, their numbers have plummeted by 76% since 1980, due largely to the demand of elephant ivory. An estimated 35,000 African elephants were slaughtered by poachers in 2012 alone. Today, there are fewer than 420,000.
- As of September 2013, 71 institutions in the Species Survival Plan for AZA care for 310 Asian and African elephants in North America, and provide expertise and millions of dollars of support for on-ground elephant conservation and research projects in the wild, zoos and health facilities.

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- As leaders in animal welfare, AZA-accredited zoos are taking a leading role in fighting the illegal poaching of elephants for their ivory. The animals at these facilities play a key role in educating and inspiring 180 million people to take conservation action. In hard dollars, AZA-accredited institutions have spent more than one billion on field conservation projects over the last 10 years.

For more information and updates, visit www.zoo.org/elephantnews.

Woodland Park Zoo

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

Association of Zoos & Aquariums

Founded in 1924, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the advancement of zoos and aquariums in the areas of conservation, education, science, and recreation. Look for the AZA logo whenever you visit a zoo or aquarium as your assurance that you are supporting a facility dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great experience for you, and a better future for all living things. The AZA is a leader in global wildlife conservation, and your link to helping animals in their native habitats. To learn more visit www.aza.org.

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