

PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

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Zoo calls on community: become an *otter spotter* for new study ***Field scientist shows ZooCorps teens how to report wild otter sightings***

WHAT: Woodland Park Zoo is reaching out to the community to become *otter spotters* to help collect information on North American river otters, which are virtually unstudied in Washington waters. The press is invited to the zoo's river otter exhibit as the project's field scientist shows ZooCorps teens how to spot river otters and report their sightings.

Zookeepers will offer special treats to the river otters to encourage a repertoire of natural behavior while the scientist discusses the otters' different habitats in the region and points out various behaviors that otter spotters should look for such as foraging, feeding, sliding or greeting other otters.

Anyone can participate in the new community science project and become an otter spotter. The reported sightings will help capture data on otter range and behavior throughout Washington and help the zoo's field research program identify future study sites.

Information and an otter spotter form can be found at www.zoo.org/conservation/otterspotter. Otter spotter tips and etiquette, and how to distinguish a river otter from a sea otter are included.

The zoo also is launching a new field study, **River Otters of Western Washington: Sentinels of Ecological Health**, which will focus on otter population biology and the contaminant loads in their scat along the length of the Green-Duwamish River. This river, in particular, traverses a diverse mosaic of habitats, including wildlands and parks; agricultural, industrial and residential areas; and the highly contaminated Lower Duwamish Waterway.

WHEN: **Photo op: Tuesday, April 12, 10:00-11:00 a.m.**

WHERE: River otter exhibit in Woodland Park Zoo's Northern Trail. Meet PR staff at the West Entrance on Phinney Ave. N. between N. 55th & N. 56th Sts.

WHO: Michelle Wainstein, PhD, a local ecologist and conservationist, and the field scientist for the otter project; and approximately 10 volunteer teens from Woodland Park Zoo's ZooCorps.

Two male North American river otters: 18-year-old Duncan and 2-year-old Ziggy.

INFO: The Green River flows from undeveloped Washington wildlands through increasingly urbanized areas to become the Duwamish River—Seattle's major industrial corridor since the early 1900s. Wainstein and the project team hope to determine if river otters are found along the entire 72-mile route of this important waterway.

The final 5 miles of the river as it empties into Puget Sound is known as the Lower Duwamish Waterway and has a complex history and challenging future. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has identified the LDW as



a Superfund site for environmental remediation in response to long-term industrial pollutant exposure and urgent concern about contaminant levels.

The new study is a project of Woodland Park Zoo's [Living Northwest](#) program that supports field conservation projects in the Pacific Northwest.

[North American river otters](#) are amphibious members of the weasel family and live in water systems all over Washington state. 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 North American 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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