PRESS RELEASE

Creative minds tackle wildlife trafficking at first-ever Zoohackathon
Local winning solution moves on to global competition

SEATTLE—Over the weekend, Woodland Park Zoo and leading conservation technology zoos in the U.S., United Kingdom, and Asia/Pacific served as host sites for the first-ever **Zoohackathon**, an event that culminated with winning solutions for tackling the global wildlife trafficking crisis.

The winning solution at Woodland Park Zoo has been awarded to the team, *Oily Palms*. The team of six created a citizen science engagement tool for citizens to report the cause of local deforestation activity to NGOs. Each team member received a year-round membership to the zoo and a behind-the-scenes animal encounter for the future.

The winning solutions from each of the host sites will be submitted to a global competition. In addition to Woodland Park Zoo, the other zoos who participated in Zoohackathon simultaneously were: San Diego Zoo; Saint Louis Zoo; Smithsonian National Zoo, Washington, D.C.; London Zoo; and Taronga Zoo, Sydney, Australia.

At Woodland Park Zoo, local coders, designers, conservation experts and other technologists hacked away in teams to develop new technological tools to help reduce the demand for illegally traded wildlife products. Wildlife trafficking and subject matter experts from U.S. Department of State, Microsoft Research, Socrata, City of Seattle, University of Washington Center for Conservation Biology, Vulcan Inc., and Woodland Park Zoo served as facilitators, judges and mentors.

Zoohackathon in Seattle was sponsored by Vulcan Inc., Google and Socrata with Woodland Park Zoo's new Wi-Fi made possible through products donated by Cisco. "Vulcan and Paul Allen are pleased to support Woodland Park Zoo's Zoohackathon. The world's wildlife is in crisis due to an explosion in the international trafficking of animals and plants," said James Deutsch, wildlife conservation director for Vulcan Philanthropy. "Technology is part of the solution, and Zoohackathon is an exciting way to engage Seattle's tech community in developing groundbreaking solutions."

"The demand for illegal animal products in international markets, including the U.S. as a top market, is growing at an unprecedented rate. Elephants, rhinos, tigers, turtles, pangolins and more are facing intense pressure and are losing the battle for survival," said Fred Koontz, PhD, vice president of field conservation at Woodland Park Zoo. "Zoos are on the front lines alongside range country scientists, rangers, NGOs, wildlife agencies, and other partners to strategically protect wildlife from threats in the wild, especially wildlife trafficking. Zoohackathon was an important event that opened the door to new minds and future collaborators. These participating individuals have become more aware about the wildlife trade and have helped us advance our efforts in our fight to protect wildlife species."

Zoohackathon teams, which ranged from high school and college students to seasoned professionals, worked from problem statements submitted by wildlife organizations such as The National Whistleblower Center, United for Wildlife, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. The problem statements reflected the complex challenges of combating wildlife trafficking including the need for: bringing high tech to local people living near protected areas; a portal that addresses palm oil-driven habitat loss; a "let the buyer beware" app for international travelers who unknowingly purchase wildlife items made from endangered or protected species; and an app for whistleblowers to safely and anonymously report wildlife crimes around the world.

Zoohackathon is organized by the U.S. Department of State and the Association of Zoos & Aquariums. In 2013, President Obama issued an [Executive Order](#) calling for the U.S. government to take steps to combat the growing threat of wildlife trafficking. The Presidential Task Force on Wildlife Trafficking was formed and helped initiate Zoohackathon. The three pillars of the Task Force are: 1) Reduce demand; 2) increase international cooperation; and 3) increase enforcement efforts.

"Conservation technology has huge potential to turn the tide on wildlife trafficking. This weekend demonstrated the strengths that the Seattle tech community has to bring to bear in finding solutions to this urgent global challenge," said Susan Cleary, director of policy and public outreach for U.S. Department of State.

The model for the inaugural Zoohackathon was the U.S. Department of State's successful Fishackathons, the first of which was launched in 2014 around Senator Kerry's *Our Ocean* conference and the third held in 2016. The three Fishackathon events have introduced new technological solutions to address the problem of worldwide, unsustainable fishing practices.

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