

PRESS RELEASE

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Technology brings guests closer than ever to Woodland Park Zoo's animals

Seattle—For more than a century, Woodland Park Zoo has provided guests with innovative ways to connect with wildlife—even pioneering the concept of immersive, naturalistic exhibits in the 1970s. Now, with local partners, the zoo is taking its approach to immersion up a notch with two exciting and groundbreaking programs, both deployed in tandem with the new Assam Rhino Reserve.



First, the zoo is partnering with technology company [Oculus](#) to pilot a virtual reality (VR) experience designed to build empathy for greater one-horned rhinos and motivate conservation action. This first-of-its-kind project utilizes 360-degree video to highlight a day in the life of the zoo's greater one-horned rhinos, Taj and Glenn. Through VR technology, the zoo is opening up behind-the-scenes areas of Assam Rhino Reserve, deepening understanding about Taj and Glenn, and demonstrating how Woodland Park Zoo's animal care team adheres to the highest standards of animal welfare.

Because this experience will be among the first of its kind in an American zoo, Woodland Park Zoo has begun research into the pilot VR experience to help determine the potential impact of VR within informal learning environments. The experience has considerable potential to augment and advance several of the core principles grounding the zoo's new strategic plan: social change, inclusion, education, innovation, community and leadership. Building empathetic connections, a key impact of Woodland Park Zoo's new direction, is a core theme woven throughout the VR experience.

"Imagine a future in which you can explore Assam Rhino Reserve at your leisure or simulate care activities, *regardless* of where you are. VR allows us the promise of transcending time and distance—making the zoo experience possible for everyone," said Woodland Park Zoo Vice President of Learning and Innovation Wei Ying Wong, PhD.

"We are thrilled to be at the forefront of applying this new technology in the zoo setting and deeply grateful for our partnership with Oculus," said Woodland Park Zoo President and CEO Alejandro Grajal, PhD. "The possibilities are limitless for VR at zoos. We foresee the promise of harnessing it to advance our broad, social movement for wildlife conservation by connecting more people, more deeply, to animals and our conservation mission. This technology also enables us to create experiences that are accessible for people of all abilities and remove physical barriers to participation."

The pilot 360-degree VR footage will be available for a sneak peek viewing at [Jungle Party](#), the zoo's annual fundraiser held this year on July 13. It will also be rolled out this fall at the Association of Zoos & Aquariums' annual conference, hosted this year in Seattle and attended by thousands of zoo and aquarium leaders from around the country.

In addition to the Oculus partnership, Woodland Park Zoo is currently implementing Rhino Lookout, a user-driven exploration of the zoo through the Woodland Park Zoo smartphone application. This mobile feature uses [Footmarks](#) beacons to send videos, quizzes, animal facts and action tips to a guest's iPhone. The beta mobile experience is being tested through November and is currently available for iPhone only. The Woodland Park Zoo app, available for iPhone and Android, also provides guests with a GPS-enabled map, a customizable daily schedule and other tools designed to make the most of a day at the zoo.

"Footmarks is proud to partner with Woodland Park Zoo in utilizing our SmartConnect™ solution to deepen visitors' connections with the wildlife and conservation mission they love and appreciate," said Footmarks President and Woodland Park Zoo Board Member Shawn

Englund. “As a result of our pilot project in the zoo’s Assam Rhino Reserve, visitors are now able to experience location-based content and learning previously unavailable in zoo exhibits—in essence, ‘choosing their own adventure’ and traveling virtually to the rhinos’ wild habitats for richer and more customized experiences.”

Founded in 1899, Woodland Park Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums and certified by the rigorous American Humane Conservation program. The Humane Certified™ seal of approval is another important validation of the zoo’s long-standing tradition of meeting the highest standards in animal welfare. Woodland Park Zoo is helping to save animals and their habitats through more than 30 field projects in the Pacific Northwest and around the world. Each year, the zoo engages more than a million visitors of all ages, backgrounds, abilities, and walks of life in extraordinary experiences with animals, inspiring them to make conservation a priority in their lives and a difference in our planet’s future ecological health and sustainability. Visit www.zoo.org and follow the zoo on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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