

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release | April 21, 2019
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Zoo will close gorilla exhibits for home improvements starting April 23 Re-opening planned in several weeks

SEATTLE—A young, athletic gorilla, a juvenile gorilla, and a couple teenage gorillas living at Woodland Park Zoo have necessitated modifications to its two gorilla habitats to meet new safety guidelines for the great apes, enhance enrichment for the lives of the gorillas and increase safety for the gorilla keepers.



Both gorilla habitats will be closed and the gorillas will be off public view starting Tuesday, April 23. Check out the zoo's website for updates: www.zoo.org/visits.

Home improvements to the habitats include heightening the walls, and installing other creature comforts to keep the gorillas safely contained and allow greater flexibility with the gorillas' day-to-day care.

In addition, perimeter railings will be raised significantly to increase safety for the gorilla keepers who need to access these non-public areas for various activities that benefit the gorillas including increasing accessibility for feeding opportunities while the gorillas are in the outdoor habitats, monitoring introductions and behaviors and watching over infant gorillas.

Eight western lowland gorillas currently live at the zoo in two separate groups. When the improvements are completed, the two groups will eventually rotate in the west and east habitats. "This will be the first time the gorillas will have an opportunity to live in both habitats on a time-share basis. Being in different surroundings will be physically stimulating and environmentally enriching for the gorillas," said Martin Ramirez, mammal curator at Woodland Park Zoo. "This will also help engage our guests—they won't know until they visit and see which habitat the groups are in for that day."

Each of the gorilla groups is led by an adult male, known as a silverback. Kwame (KWA-may), a 19-year-old silverback, moved to Woodland Park Zoo last fall and was introduced to his group of females. "There couldn't have been an easier transition to a leadership role than Kwame. He immediately assumed the role of a silverback, which is to protect, lead and maintain peace," explained Ramirez.

Kwame lives with 23-year-old female Nadiri, 17-year-old female Akenji, 11-year-old female Uzumma and 3-year-old female Yola.

The second group consists of 40-year-old male Vip, 50-year-old female Amanda and 33-year-old female Jumoke. Amanda was reintroduced to this group after her mate of three years, Pete, passed away last November at 50 years old.

The improvements to the gorilla habitats are being made possible by the [Seattle Park District](#) ballot measure, passed by Seattle voters four years ago. The funding provided by the Park District—about \$1.8 million a year—goes toward the zoo's preventive major maintenance projects such as dens, trees, caves, hot rocks, roofs and watering holes for the animals.

The western lowland gorilla lives in seven countries across west equatorial Africa: southeast Nigeria, Gabon, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, Angola and Equatorial Guinea. All gorillas are endangered; the western lowland gorilla is critically endangered. The estimated population of western lowland gorillas in the wild is approximately 300,000 individuals. There are four primary reasons gorillas are endangered. One is habitat destruction caused by logging, mining, and slash and burn agriculture. Poaching for the

bushmeat trade, facilitated by logging, has become an immediate threat to the western lowland gorilla population, particularly in Cameroon. Additionally, infectious diseases such as the Ebola virus have become a great threat, killing many gorillas; and climate change is causing the drying of the region, creating negative impacts on forest ecology and species.

Woodland Park Zoo supports conservation efforts for the western lowland gorilla and mountain gorilla through the [Mbeli Bai Gorilla Study and Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund](#). To help support these important projects, drop off used handheld electronics (cell phones, MP3 players, handheld games, e-readers, digital still and video cameras, GPS, portable hard drives, etc.) at the zoo. The handheld electronics are turned over to ECO-CELL, which operates a strict NO LANDFILL program. ECO-CELL reuses mineral ore from these devices to reduce the demand for unsustainable coltan mining in the Congo that destroys habitat for critically endangered gorillas. The zoo directs funds from ECO-CELL toward the Mbeli Bai Gorilla Study and Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund.

Zoo hours through April 30 are 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. daily. For more information or to become a zoo member, visit www.zoo.org or call 206.548.2500.

Founded in 1899, Woodland Park 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. The zoo is helping to save animals and their habitats in the wild through more than 35 wildlife conservation projects in the Pacific Northwest and around the world. 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. Visit www.zoo.org and follow the zoo on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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