

## PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release | July 18, 2019  
Media contact: Gigi Allanic, Meghan Sawyer  
206.548.2550 | [woodlandparkzoo@zoo.org](mailto:woodlandparkzoo@zoo.org)

Editor note: Dropbox link for high res photos: <https://bit.ly/2O0rvvF>

### Woodland Park Zoo forges cultural connections across the Pacific Ocean

SEATTLE—Two indigenous communities living 10,500 kilometers (6,520+ miles) apart share a deep cultural connection to their respective lifeways, landscapes, seascapes and wildlife. One lives in the cloud forests of Papua New Guinea and the other along the shores of the Salish Sea west of Bellingham, Wash. These two groups will blend their hearts, minds, and spirituality in an exchange of cultures, languages, histories, and ancestral knowledge during this summer's annual intertribal canoe journey that takes place in the waters of the Salish Sea.



From Puget Sound to the Strait of Georgia in British Columbia, this summer's canoe journey, [\*Paddle to Lummi\*](#), will be hosted by the Lummi Nation from July 24 to 28. It will include the participation of more than 100 canoes from across the Salish Sea to celebrate the rich history and the resilience of Salish Sea indigenous cultures.

The cultural exchange between indigenous peoples of Papua New Guinea and the Lummi Nation is a part of the [Tree Kangaroo Conservation Program](#) (TKCP), Woodland Park Zoo's signature international conservation program.

The delegation from Papua New Guinea will represent several important components of TKCP and its community-based conservation initiative, including sustainable resource use, environmental education, health and local livelihoods. They will spend time with the Lummi and other Salish tribes to share and learn from each other including their natural bonds with their landscapes and iconic wildlife, their traditional practices for managing natural resources sustainably, the similarities and differences in their experiences, how they view their cultures and traditions, and how they're working to practice, protect, and celebrate these traditions in the face of outside influences and pressures.

TKCP was founded in 1996 by Woodland Park Zoo Senior Conservation Scientist and TKCP Director Lisa Dabek, PhD. What began as a conservation research study on the endangered Matschie's tree kangaroo has blossomed into a holistic program that focuses on protecting a wide range of endemic wildlife and Papua New Guinea's rain forests, and empowering the people who share the forests.

Papua New Guinea's forests are one of the most biodiverse regions in the world. The Matschie's tree kangaroo is Papua New Guinea's largest endemic mammal aside from humans. Native to the Huon Peninsula of Papua New Guinea, they live in mountainous rain forests at elevations of up to 11,000 feet and spend most of their time in trees. The mahogany-furred animals are the size of a small domestic dog and weigh 15 to 20 pounds. Matschie's tree kangaroos are an endangered species due to habitat destruction and overhunting.

In 2009, TKCP worked with 50 villages and more than 14,000 indigenous landowners, their families, and the national government to create the first nationally recognized Conservation Area in Papua New Guinea's history. The YUS (Yopno-Uruwa-Som) Conservation Area spans 187,000 acres of pristine rain forest habitat for the protection of tree kangaroos and other endemic species of Papua New Guinea's Huon Peninsula. The indigenous clans own more than 90% of the land, putting them in control of its preservation and stewardship.

The rare Matschie's tree kangaroo and the dwindling southern resident orca are powerful living symbols for the ecological health of the remote mountain forests of Papua New Guinea

and the Salish Sea, respectively. “This cultural exchange is foundational to building an ongoing relationship between the people of Papua New Guinea and other indigenous peoples around the world,” said Dabek. “Through this exchange we hope to reinforce their pride in maintaining a healthy YUS landscape and to connect them with resources and insights from other communities with common interests and values.”

In fall 2018, Lummi Nation representative Cathy Ballew joined TKCP in Papua New Guinea to initiate the relationship between Lummi and YUS communities, and to learn about local knowledge of the environment as well as the use of traditional medicines. “I was honored to have traveled to Papua New Guinea to visit one of the villages in the YUS area. It was a great experience and it also made me think how easy life used to be growing up on this reservation...my grandmothers were traditional medicine women, using our plants for remedies for healing,” said Ballew.

The responsibility for protecting their land and wildlife falls not only on the shoulders of the adults sharing the forests, but also on the children. More than 500 kids of all ages participate in TKCP’s [Junior Rangers](#) program of Papua New Guinea. “The lives of more than 150 youth who did not have the means to continue their education have been transformed by the opportunity to develop useful skills in stewardship and leadership and to contribute to their community’s conservation efforts,” said Gibson Sil Galla’h with TKCP’s Education and Leadership team. “As the kids practice new skills, Junior Rangers begin to see their role in conservation...they see themselves as future conservation stewards and leaders of their landscape. Basically, they see themselves in conservation as leaders of tomorrow and partners of today.”

Several volunteer Junior Ranger teachers and Gibson Sil Galla’h will take part in the Lummi exchange to help ensure that culture and traditional knowledge are integrated into the youth program.

To improve local livelihoods while providing incentives for conservation, TKCP has partnered with local landowners and with specialty coffee roasting companies, including Caffe Vita. The Seattle-based coffee roaster buys coffee directly from the YUS farmers to sell in the U.S.

By selling farm-direct, YUS farmers earn revenues more than double the local market rates, explained Dabek. Farmer earnings through the sale of YUS Conservation Coffee helps families pay for their children’s school fees, cover health costs, improve their homes, establish savings and reinvest in their livelihoods. Two of these coffee farmers will be among the visiting delegation from Papua New Guinea and will tour Caffe Vita’s roastery on Capitol Hill.

Visit <https://www.zoo.org/tkcp> for information about the Tree Kangaroo Conservation Program.

**Press Interviews and Photo Opportunities: Contact [woodlandparkzoopr@zoo.org](mailto:woodlandparkzoopr@zoo.org)**  
**Friday, July 19, 9:00–10:00 a.m.:** Caffe Vita visit: Papua New Guinea’s coffee farmers will go on an exclusive tour of the Capitol Hill roastery at 1005 E. Pike St., Seattle

**Monday–Sunday, July 22–28:** On the Lummi Reservation, coordinated by the Lummi Nation’s Sovereignty and Treaty Protection Office. Schedule will include participation in canoe journey protocols, roundtable discussion with Lummi tribal elders and leaders, and a journey through the Lummi ancestral waters in the Salish Sea accompanied by Lummi tribal linguists and historians.

**Wednesday–Sunday, July 24–28:** [Paddle to Lummi](#). Events are ongoing.

**Monday–Wednesday, July 29–31:** Back in Seattle

**Tuesday, July 30, 6:00–9:00 p.m. | Program begins at 6:30:** Event at Woodland Park Zoo for ~80 guests. Invites include the delegation from Papua New Guinea, representatives from the Lummi Nation and other tribal partners, donors, other special guests.

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](http://www.zoo.org) and follow the zoo on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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