

## PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

For immediate release | August 5, 2019  
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Editor note: For directions to the recovery site in Lakewood, please contact the zoo's PR staff **by August 8: [woodlandparkzoo@zoo.org](mailto:woodlandparkzoo@zoo.org)**. The release site is not publicized in order to protect the sensitive habitat.

### **Endangered turtles being released to the wild on August 9** ***Local population recovery is slow, but steady***



**WHAT:** The press is invited **Friday, August 9**, to a protected recovery site where Woodland Park Zoo and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will release approximately 40 juvenile western pond turtles (*Actinemys marmorata*), an endangered species.

In 1991, only about 150 western pond turtles remained in two populations in the state of Washington and the species nearly became extinct. In 1993, the state listed the western pond turtle as endangered.

Returning the turtles to the wild is part of the collaborative [Western Pond Turtle Recovery Project](#), Washington state's longest-running species reintroduction project.

Under the recovery project, the turtles were collected from the wild as eggs and are given a head start on life under the care of Woodland Park Zoo; the head start improves their chance of survival in the wild.

Unlike turtles in the wild, the head start turtles are fed at the zoo throughout the winter; by summer they are nearly as big as 3-year-old turtles that grew up in the wild. Once the turtles reach about 2 ounces—a suitable size to escape the mouths of invasive predatory bullfrogs—they are returned to protected sites in their natural range and monitored by biologists.

Collaborative recovery efforts over the last 28 years have resulted in more than 2,300 turtles being head started and self-sustaining populations re-established in two regions of the state: Puget Sound and the Columbia River Gorge. Surveys indicate that more than 1,000 of the released turtles have survived and continue to thrive at six sites.

**WHEN:** **Friday, August 9, 10:00-11:00 a.m.:** The turtles will be released at a recovery site.

**WHERE:** Lakewood, Wash. **For directions, please contact the zoo's PR staff by August 8.** The release site is not publicized in order to protect the sensitive habitat.

**VISUALS:** Zoo staff and guests releasing turtles in the ponds.

**INFO:** The western pond turtle ranges in Washington to the San Joaquin Valley in California. By 1990, the western pond turtle numbers plummeted to only about 150 in two populations in the state of Washington. These last remaining individuals struggled for survival as they battled predation by the non-native bullfrog, disease and habitat loss. A respiratory disease threatened the remaining turtles and biologists could not find evidence confirming hatchling survival.

In 1991, Woodland Park Zoo and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) joined forces to recover western pond turtles by initiating a head start program. In 1999, Oregon Zoo joined the recovery team and, over the years, other nonprofits, government agencies and private partners have contributed to the multi-institutional conservation project.

Each spring, WDFW biologists go in the field to attach transmitters to adult female western pond turtles. They monitor the turtles every few hours during the nesting season to locate nesting sites and they protect the nests from predators with wire enclosure cages. A portion of the eggs and hatchlings are collected and transported to Woodland Park and Oregon Zoos where they can grow in safety.

Over the last several years, an emerging shell disease affecting 29 to 49 percent of the wild population threatens decades of recovery progress. Known to cause lesions in a turtle's shell, severe cases can lead to lowered fitness and even death. Chicago's Shedd Aquarium and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign have joined the recovery efforts by collaborating to better understand the disease. The aquarium and university are looking at the disease from a microbial and pathological perspective to better understand its origin and the role environmental factors could play. The goal is to give young turtles a better chance at survival in the wild.

Woodland Park Zoo and Oregon Zoo are working with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and other partners to address this urgent situation: studying the disease, treating severely diseased turtles, and providing overwinter care for turtles to allow their shells to heal before they are released back into the wild. After the treated turtles are released, WDFW monitors the turtles to determine if they remain healthy and are able to reproduce normally in the wild.

While slowly making its way toward recovery, the western pond turtle population still faces threats such as the loss of suitable habitat, invasive bullfrog predation and disease.

Visit [here](#) for tips on how to help protect turtles.

The western pond turtle is one of more than 20 species that are part of the [Association of Zoos & Aquariums' \(AZA\) SAFE](#) (Saving Animals From Extinction) initiative, which focuses on the collective expertise within AZA's accredited institutions and leverages their massive audiences to save species. AZA and its members are convening scientists and stakeholders to identify the threats, develop action plans, raise new resources and engage the public. AZA SAFE harnesses the collective power of all AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums and invites the public to join the effort.

For more information or to become a zoo member, visit [www.zoo.org](http://www.zoo.org) or call 206.548.2500.

Summer hours through September 2: 9:30 a.m.–6:00 p.m. daily. September 3 through September 30: 9:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday; 9:30 a.m.–6:00 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

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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