

PRESS RELEASE

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Woodland Park Zoo to Seek New Home for Hippos Lily and Lupe

Seattle - Woodland Park Zoo is announcing today that we will begin the process of seeking new homes for our beloved hippos, Lily and Lupe. This decision is based on two considerations: animal wellbeing and resource sustainability.



"Lily and Lupe are beloved by our staff and community. This decision was not made lightly, and we will all be sad to see them leave," said Woodland Park Zoo President and CEO Alejandro Grajal. "Despite this, our highest commitment is to the full-life care and wellness of our animals. We want them to continue to thrive and will do everything we can to prepare them for a safe and successful move."

In the coming months, the zoo will be working with accredited partners through the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) Species Survival Plan to identify the best placement for Lily and Lupe.

Water Lily, affectionately called Lily, was born in August 1978 at Houston Zoo and moved to Woodland Park Zoo the following year in October 1979. She is 41 years old and weighs 2,980 pounds.

Guadalupe, called Lupe by her friends and fans, was born in November 1999 at Disney's Animal Kingdom. She moved to Woodland Park Zoo in 2003. She is 20 years old and weighs 2,900 pounds.

In the wild, hippos have been known to live about 40 years, and in zoos they can live into their 50s. Lily and Lupe are inquisitive animals who have developed close relationships with their keepers. They love treats, like munching on a whole head of lettuce or playing with watermelons and pumpkins in their pool.

Animal Wellbeing

One of the primary reasons Woodland Park Zoo made the decision to begin seeking a new home for Lily and Lupe at this time is their ages and life stages.

Lupe is at an appropriate age for breeding. Based on Lupe's genetic makeup, she is recommended for breeding by AZA so that she can help sustain a genetically healthy population.

The current hippo exhibit at Woodland Park Zoo was designed 40 years ago to house two hippos. It was not intended as a breeding facility, and therefore the space does not allow for a male and female to be separated or have offspring.

With Lupe's move under consideration, we needed to think about what is best for Lily. Hippos are social animals and need companionship. At 41 years old, Lily is healthy enough to move to a new home and acclimate to a new social group. In a few years, however, a similar move would be much more challenging for her.

Woodland Park Zoo will begin working with accredited AZA institutions this week to determine the best home(s) for Lily and Lupe. The new home(s) will likely be identified by spring, and any potential move will likely occur in the fall of 2020 or later. Animal Care staff from Woodland Park Zoo will accompany the hippos and help them settle in to their new home(s). Ideally, Lily and Lupe can be placed in a new home together. However, they may be placed separately if there is an opportunity for them both to thrive in different social groups.

Factors that will influence the timeline of a move include weather in the location of the new home to avoid extreme hot or cold temperatures during the move, exhibit modifications to safely move the hippos and accommodate a relocation vehicle, and healthcare evaluations to ensure both Lily and Lupe are healthy and able to travel safely. Training will also be an important factor. Lily and Lupe will be moved in specially-outfitted, animal-safe transportation crates. The hippos will be provided extended access to their moving crates to allow them to enter and exit freely and become comfortable in the space. This training will help ensure their safety and reduce stress during the move.

Water Sustainability

Water sustainability is also a significant consideration in this decision. The zoo is committed to and constantly evaluating our sustainable practices. In order to provide a healthy and clean environment for the hippos, their pool is drained, cleaned and refilled with water between two and three times each week. This clean environment has meant that hippos in the exhibit have lived long, healthy lives with no health problems attributed to their housing.

However, the zoo has been monitoring water usage in the hippo pool, which accounts for almost 20 percent of the zoo's total annual water usage. We have been discussing options for the last couple of years related to hippo pool water usage and filtration. With the decision made to move Lily and Lupe in the best interest of the hippos' wellbeing comes the responsibility and opportunity to assess how next to use the current exhibit.

Given all of the factors above, the zoo has made the difficult decision not to seek new hippos for the exhibit.

Over the coming months, the zoo will evaluate the space to determine how to best utilize it with an eye to both animal care and environmental sustainability.

Woodland Park Zoo will continue to communicate updates on the status of Lily and Lupe.

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