

## PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

For immediate release | August 8, 2021  
Media contact: Gigi Allianic, Meghan Sawyer  
[woodlandparkzoopr@zoo.org](mailto:woodlandparkzoopr@zoo.org)

Editor note: For directions to the recovery site, email [woodlandparkzoopr@zoo.org](mailto:woodlandparkzoopr@zoo.org) by **Thursday, August 12, 5:00 p.m.** At the release site, all media, participants, and staff are expected to wear a mask covering the nose and mouth when 6-feet social distancing cannot be maintained.

### **Turtle power! Tiny, mighty turtles head back to the wild August 13 State proclaims the week of August 8 as “Western Pond Turtle Recovery Week” for 30-Year Anniversary**



**WHAT:** Once teetering on the brink of extinction, the western pond turtle (*Actinemys marmorata*)—one of only two turtle species native to the state of Washington—is making a comeback and thriving 30 years later. In “shellebration” of 30 years of collaborative efforts to restore the population in Washington state, Governor Jay Inslee has proclaimed August 8–14, 2021 as “Western Pond Turtle Recovery Week.”

The press is invited **Friday, August 13**, to a protected recovery site in Lakewood, Wash. where Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and Woodland Park Zoo will release 35 juvenile western pond turtles.

Each year, under the [Western Pond Turtle Recovery Project](#), Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife biologists collect the turtle eggs from the wild. The eggs hatch at Woodland Park Zoo where the hatchlings can grow in safety and are given a head start on life under the care of the zoo. Unlike turtles in the wild, the hatchlings are fed 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 non-native predatory bullfrogs—they are returned to protected sites in their native habitat to experience the next chapter of their lives: living in protected wetlands where they can submerge in vegetation, bask on logs, swim among mud banks, and dine on insects, amphibians and aquatic plants. Here, they are monitored by biologists.

**WHEN:** **Friday, August 13, 10:00-11:30 a.m.** The turtles will be released following brief remarks.

**WHERE:** Recovery site located in Lakewood, Wash. For directions, contact the zoo’s PR staff at [woodlandparkzoopr@zoo.org](mailto:woodlandparkzoopr@zoo.org) by **August 12**. The release site is not publicized in order to protect the sensitive habitat.

**WHO:** Approximately 40 guests including Congresswoman Marilyn Strickland (WA-10); Washington state and Pierce County elected officials; Washington Fish and Wildlife Commissioner Fred Koontz; and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and Woodland Park Zoo staff.

**VISUALS:** Brief remarks, guests releasing turtles in the ponds, scopes to see adult turtles.

**INFO:** In 1990, only about 150 western pond turtles remained in two populations in the state of Washington and the species nearly became extinct. 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 1993, the state listed the western pond turtle as endangered.

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.

Collaborative recovery efforts over the last three decades 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 approximately 800 to 1,000 of the released turtles have survived and continue to thrive at six sites.

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, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Dr. Katherine Haman of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife 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 can 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.

### **Help save turtles**

- Reduce pollutants to turtle habitat by eliminating chemical pesticides from your gardening practices.
- Improve the quality of wildlife habitat by joining a habitat restoration program in your community.
- Use a reputable source when purchasing or adopting pet turtles and make sure the species is legal to own and the animals have been sourced legally.
- Take care to not release unwanted pets or animals into wild habitat—non-native species can outcompete or prey on native turtles. Call your local animal shelter to find a new home for an unwanted pet.
- Support Woodland Park Zoo and other organizations working to conserve endangered turtles.

### **Become a ZooParent!**

Show support and celebrate the Western Pond Turtle Recovery Project by becoming a Digital ZooParent and adopting a western pond turtle! All ZooParent adoptions help fund the care of all the animals at Woodland Park Zoo, as well as support the zoo's wildlife conservation programs in the Pacific Northwest and around the world. To become a western pond turtle Digital ZooParent or to check out the other available ZooParent animals and levels, visit [www.zoo.org/zooparent](http://www.zoo.org/zooparent).

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

###