

## Biologists prepare endangered pond turtles for release to protected wetlands

**WHAT:** The press is invited **Wednesday, July 27**, as Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife biologists prepare more than 35 western pond turtles (*Actinemys marmorata*) for release to the wild. As part of the [Western Pond Turtle Recovery Project](#), the juvenile turtles will be released in August to protected wetlands in the state.



Turtle fans will be able to watch the turtles be weighed, measured and their shells notched for identification. The process is part of the recovery project to help prepare the turtles for 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.

In addition, zoo volunteers and docents will be on hand for turtle questions and a turtle activity station for kids.

The biologists collect the eggs from wild nests and bring them to the zoo where they are incubated for two to three months. Under the care of the zoo's animal keepers, the turtles are given a head start on life—they are fed a hearty diet throughout the winter safely away from predators. By the time summer rolls around, they are bigger than wild turtles at that age and big enough to escape the mouths of invasive bullfrogs; they must be at least 2 ounces to be released. Every August, they are returned to local protected wetlands and monitored by WDFW biologists.

**WHEN:** **Press photo op: Wednesday, July 27, 10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.**

**WHERE:** Enter through Woodland Park Zoo's **SOUTH ENTRANCE at N. 50<sup>th</sup> St. & Fremont Ave N.** The entrance is located near the Rose Garden. PR staff will escort the press to the Chicken Barn located in the Family Farm.

**VISUALS:** Staff and biologists preparing turtles, including weighing, measuring and notching shells for identification; turtle activity station for kids.

**INFO:** Western pond turtles help to balance local wetland ecosystems. 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 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 of the released turtles have survived and continue to thrive at six sites.

Over the last several years, an emerging shell disease threatens decades of recovery progress for the wild population. Through a grant in 2021 from the Association of Zoos & Aquariums' SAFE (Saving Animals From Extinction) granting program, Woodland Park Zoo and collaborating institutions are researching this new shell disease and how it occurs in managed care environments and turtle rearing practices.

**Help save turtles and keep their local habitats clean and healthy**

- Avoid pesticides when you garden.
- Dispose of litter properly.
- Call a rescue organization when you need to rehome aquatic pets.
- Volunteer to clean up local habitats.

**Become a ZooParent!**

Show support for 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).

Woodland Park Zoo advocates for saving species and spaces around the Pacific Northwest through its [Living Northwest Program](#), including western pond turtles, wolves, wolverines and many others. The recently reimagined Living Northwest Trail exhibit and its companion website, "[We Are Living Northwest](#)," provide visitors with numerous conservation actions to take to help the species that share the region's iconic landscapes. Anyone can share how they are living Northwest using #IAmLivingNorthwest on social media—they may even be featured on the website!

For more information or to become a zoo member, visit [www.zoo.org](http://www.zoo.org) or call 206.548.2500. Follow the zoo on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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