

PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

For immediate release | August 8, 2022
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Editor note: For directions to the recovery site, email woodlandparkzoo@zoo.org by **Thursday, August 11, 5:00 p.m.** Or text: 206.707.1648.

Video: [Turtles Return to Pacific Northwest Waters - YouTube](#)

Endangered turtles head back to the wild August 12



WHAT: Western pond turtles help to balance local wetland ecosystems. At the start of every summer, the turtles are collected as eggs from wild nests and transported to Woodland Park Zoo where they are incubated for two to three months. After hatching, the turtles are expertly cared for by the zoo's animal keepers and given a head start on life where they can grow in safety; they are released nearly a year later. As part of the [Western Pond Turtle Recovery Project](#), approximately 20 to 25 juvenile turtles, among last year's hatchlings, will be released back to their protected wetlands **Friday, August 12**.

At the zoo, the hatchlings 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 protected sites in their native habitat and 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 Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife biologists.

WHEN: **Friday, August 12, 10:00-11:30 a.m.**

WHERE: Recovery site located in Lakewood, Wash. For directions, contact the zoo's PR staff at woodlandparkzoo@zoo.org by **August 11**. The release site is not publicized in order to protect the sensitive habitat.

WHO: Approximately 20 guests including Washington state and local elected officials, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and Woodland Park Zoo

VISUALS: Guests releasing turtles in the ponds, scopes to see adult turtles, turtle biofacts

INFO: The western pond turtle (*Actinemys marmorata*)—one of only two turtle species native to the state of Washington—once teetered on the brink of extinction. In 1990, only about 150 remained in two populations in the state. 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.

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. Show the zoo your favorite #IAMLivingNorthwest moment! Your post may appear on the zoo's new screen in Living Northwest Trail and you'll also be entered to win a family six-pack of WildLanterns tickets.

How to enter: Post a photo of your time in nature (such as your favorite summer nature escape) and tell the zoo how you are Living Northwest! Use the tag and post on your preferred social media platform (Facebook, Instagram or Twitter) between August 1, and October 31, 2022 and you'll be entered to win. Winner will be announced shortly after October 31.

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

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