

Seattle Board of Park Commissioners

Third quarter, 2011

Woodland Park Zoo won top awards for both education programming and environmental sustainability at the annual meeting of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) in September.



The zoo has won education and seven top exhibit design awards in the past from the AZA, the accrediting organization for more than 200 zoos and aquariums in North America, but this is the first time Woodland Park has taken the top education prize.

The education award went to the zoo's "Ready, Set, Discover" program, which is focused on 4th and 5th graders from low-income schools, primarily in the Kent School District. Ready, Set, Discover is an inquiry-based program that helps improve science skills and foster stewardship of the environment. Over a two-year period, students participate in seven experiences designed to bring nature-based science into their classrooms, to take the students out into nature for field research, and to connect students with nature at the zoo.

In addition, this was the first time the AZA has presented awards for environmental sustainability, and Woodland Park was honored with the Green Significant Achievement Award in recognition of its comprehensive sustainability program.

The zoo has formally adopted a sustainability plan focused on reducing zoo greenhouse gas emissions to 7% below 1990 levels by 2012 and 20% by 2020. Through public and private partnerships, the zoo's feature sustainability projects include Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold certification for the zoo's West Entrance and LEED Gold for Zoomazium, an indoor nature play space. The award-winning, sustainably built Humboldt penguin exhibit uses geothermal energy and an innovative filtration system that saves 3 million gallons of water and nearly 22,000 kilowatt hours of energy per year over the previous penguin exhibit.

Financial results improved in the third quarter, but overall 2011 results are still lagging projections because of sub par attendance in the cold, wet spring and summer, the third quarter results provided some relief.

July 2011 was one of the lowest attendance months on record, but it was followed by a record-setting August and the second-highest September attendance in the zoo's history. Part of that success came from an experiment with Groupon, which added more than 20,000 visits in those final two months.

Total attendance, year-to-date, was about 10 percent below the budgeted estimate. The special exhibit for the summer, Dinosaurs, ended in early September. Just over one-quarter – 27.4 percent – of all summer zoo visitors went through the exhibit.

The zoo used the display of more than a dozen animatronic dinosaurs to provide guests with an interpretive program about extinction and conservation. Plantings in the area were chosen particularly to represent species that were alive in the same era as the dinosaurs.

The exhibit was free to all guests on Sept. 10-11 for “Heroes’ Weekend,” honoring active and retired service members and first responders.

Other summer programming included extended hours and programs in Zoomazium, which had 110,000 third quarter visitors. Other Summer Zoo Experiences included 16 scheduled weekly keeper talks, a daily elephant interpretive program, elephant feeding, two daily raptor flight programs, twice daily giraffe feedings and other summer offerings.

In September, the zoo launched its Quarters for Conservation project to allow zoo visitors to participate more fully in field conservation programs. Two interactive conservation kiosks – made from surplus Metro bus shelters • were opened at the South and West Entrance Plazas.

Zoo guests are given a token as they enter and told they can use the token to vote for one of six high-profile, field-conservation projects. The token represents 25 cents from every zoo admission, although visitors are so moved by the opportunity to participate in the process that they’re dropping in their own change as well. To date, over 15,000 votes have been cast with over \$350 in additional cash donated to the various projects.

The inaugural six projects are:

- Saving Wildlife in the Pacific Northwest
- Conserving Papua New Guinea Forests and Tree Kangaroos
- Discovering Conservation Solutions for Asian Hornbills
- Tracking Snow Leopards: The “Ghosts of Mongolia”
- Protecting the Orangutans of Borneo
- Ensuring Survival of African Elephants: Parks Without Borders

Also during the summer and third quarter, the zoo initiated several new transportation programs to help reduce its long-term need for access and parking.

A new roadway was opened, inside the zoo’s 92 acres but outside the perimeter fence, which connects parking lots on the west and north sides. This not only reduced traffic circulation in the nearby neighborhoods, but also added to the parking supply for guests as a former employee lot near the administrative offices was reserved exclusively for zoo guests during periods of high parking demand.

To compensate for that change, the zoo increased its demand-management programs for staff, which include incentives to carpool, walk or ride bikes to work.

Zoo members were given the added benefit of an early opening on summer weekends, to help reduce demand at peak periods.

The zoo conducted a very successful experiment with a shuttle service from the Eastside. Metro Transit bus riders were given a discount on zoo admission, and zoo members – who wouldn’t benefit from an admissions discount – were given free bus tickets in their summer member magazine.

A working group of community volunteers will review the results of the summer activity and make recommendations to the zoo about 2012 activities, as well as long term solutions to transportation and access issues.

Capital Projects

Significant planning and design continues on the eventual replacement of the zoo's oldest exhibits, for tigers and Asian bears. A multidisciplinary team of zoo staff continues to work with Studio Hanson Roberts on the development of the new exhibit. The full team met for several full-day workshops this quarter and explored ways to incorporate innovation in animal care, guest experiences and energy and water-saving features that will allow for long-term operation and maintenance savings.

In September, the zoo's Board of Directors approved a two-phased construction schedule and scope. The scope of work for Phase I construction will include an East/West cross-over main loop path, underground utilities, an Asian small-clawed otter exhibit and a themed play area. Phase I construction is scheduled to start after Labor Day 2012 and open to the public May 1, 2013.

Phase II, which will include tiger and Asian bear exhibits, is expected to open in 2014, depending on the success of on-going fundraising activity.

The area to be replaced is almost two acres and will represent the largest new project at the zoo since the development of the orangutan ("Trail of Vines") exhibit in 1996.

Major Maintenance in the third quarter included completion of zoo wide replacement of fluorescent lights in City Light's program. Other sustainability projects included the completion of energy upgrades to the air handling system for the Day exhibit and preliminary work on the boiler replacement in the Maintenance Bungalow. Safety related modifications included the replacement of gates at the giraffe crossing with taller, stronger gates to accommodate growing animals.

Animal Management

There were significant changes in the animal collection in the third quarter.

They include the addition of a miniature donkey and two domestic goats for the Family Farm. A brown booby (seabird) arrived from a wildlife rehabilitation center in Hoquiam, Washington. The bird was found in Washington, far out of its natural range, having presumably been blown off course or stowed away on a ship from South America. It will be displayed in the Humboldt penguin exhibit.

Departures included a female Bali mynah, which was transferred to the Audubon Zoo in New Orleans in accordance with Species Survival Plan (SSP) recommendations.

Two endangered Louisiana pine snakes hatched in August. The young snakes were sent to the Memphis Zoo in September for eventual release to the wild as part of the SSP's efforts to rebuild healthy populations of this species.

An African wild dog was humanely euthanized after a period of illness and refusing to eat. A female wallaroo was humanely euthanized after being treated for toxoplasmosis.

In July, Woodland Park Zoo celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Western Pond Turtle Recovery Project, which started at WPZ, with the release of 47 turtles at three locations in the state of Washington. The pond turtle was in serious decline when the program began,

with only 150 turtles documented in the wild. Today there are over 1,500 in the state, thanks to head starting and captive release programs.

In commemoration of the project's 20th year, Gov. Christine Gregoire proclaimed the week of July 25, 2011 to be the "Western Pond Turtle Recovery Project 20-Year Anniversary."

In July and August, about 1,000 endangered Oregon silverspot butterfly pupae were released to protected habitat in Cascade Head and Bray Point on the Oregon Coast as part of a continuing species recovery project by Woodland Park Zoo, the Oregon Zoo, the Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Those butterflies will continue to build the endangered population there, as the program begins to look for new release locations in the State of Washington.

And 20 Egyptian tortoises were transferred to the Turtle Survival Alliance in September. These animals are genetically well represented in the captive population and therefore surplus to the SSP's breeding needs. The TSA will supervise distribution of these tortoises to appropriate facilities and individuals. The funds raised by this program go directly to conservation of this critically endangered species.

Education

While school visits are down during the school summer vacation period, education programming at the zoo is very busy during this period.

Registration at the summer day camps exceeded the anticipated budget and totaled 1,555 participants. Zoomazium had 110,000 visitors in the third quarter.

School-to-Zoo programs resumed in September, and the zoo held the first of three Home school Days. School-to-Zoo provides students at King County schools with 30% or more of their students in the free or reduced fee lunch program with reimbursed admission and transportation to the zoo.

The zoo's outreach programs reached 2,448 participants, with a primary audience among those who attended programs at Seattle Public Libraries tied in with the Summer Reading Program. A new program – Up CLOSE: Little Critters – was offered to the libraries this summer to provide tailored experiences for children 5 and under. In all, 13 Little Critter programs were presented, each at a different branch of the Seattle Public Library, with the majority taking place during the branch's scheduled story time. The audiences ranged from 39 to 300.

In a survey of attendees, a majority said they had previously attended story time, about 18% did say this was their first time at the program. In addition, 29% of attendees indicated that it was their first time at the branch library where the program was being held. Only a small number of program attendees (8%) had not yet been to Woodland Park Zoo

In education programs aimed at older kids, 87 teen volunteers staffed interactive carts and backpacks at eight different areas to talk about the zoo's conservation messages. They also helped staff in the Contact Area and zoo camps with their young visitors and students. Teen volunteers also staffed the arts-and-crafts station at each ZooTunes concert.

Other activities for this group included assisting the horticulture department, meeting with keepers from the elephant, and penguin exhibits, and the conservation aviary, to learn more about the animals in those units.

Twenty teens participated in paid internships in a variety of zoo departments.

During the months of July and August Zoo Crew, the zoo's new community-outreach program for low-income middle school students served over 200 students. Zoo Crew instructors designed and delivered curriculum at partner sites and/or facilitated zoo field trips for Meredith Mathews YMCA YU Learn program, Neighborhood House Highpoint Center and Refuge Woman's Alliance.

Woodland Park is one of only a few zoos who conduct in-house research among its guests. The exit surveys conducted every July and August provide an overview of the summer visitor experience. This year, key findings included:

- 98% of those interviewed said they would recommend Woodland Park Zoo to a friend, with 85% of those saying they would be "very likely"
- 97% said their zoo visit met or exceeded their expectations.
- 93% of visitor groups agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that *"Our trip to the zoo was worth the time and money."*
- 97% rating the quality of care that the zoo provides its animals as "good", "very good" or "exceptional".

Volunteers

Volunteer recruitment and training was conducted in September and involved nine two-day classes this year with 150 new adult volunteers.

In July and August docents delivered 660 programs to 125,000 guests, almost doubling the programming in the same time period a year ago.