

## PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

For immediate release | August 7, 2023  
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Editor note: For directions to the recovery site, email [woodlandparkzoo@zoo.org](mailto:woodlandparkzoo@zoo.org) by **Thursday, August 10, 4:30 p.m.** Or text: 206.707.1648.

Media link for video and photos:

<https://zoo.resourcespace.com/?c=3519&k=069b88d432>

### **Endangered turtles head back to the wild August 11** ***32 years of recovering western pond turtles***



**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 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](#), 37 juvenile turtles will be released back to their protected wetlands **Friday, August 11**.

The zoo's animal keepers take excellent care of the precious turtles. Safely away from predators, the hatchlings bask under heat lamps and in pools throughout the winters which allows them to invest their time and energy in eating and growing rather than hibernating. By the time summer rolls around, they are bigger than wild turtles at that age and, more importantly, too big to fit in the mouths of predatory, 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.

Zoo-goers, especially turtle fans, can see where this year's hatchlings will be head started in the zoo's new Turtle Head Start Center in Cathy Herzig Basecamp Northwest in Living Northwest Trail.

**WHEN:** **Friday, August 11, 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](mailto:woodlandparkzoo@zoo.org) by **August 10**. To protect the sensitive habitat, the release site is not publicized.

**WHO:** Approximately 40 guests including Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and Woodland Park Zoo

**VISUALS:** Guests releasing turtles in the ponds, scopes to see adult turtles basking and 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**

- Never release unwanted home or classroom pets, animals, or plants into the wild, such as rivers, streams, lakes or stormwater ponds. Most unwanted pets will not survive in the wild and may suffer before death. If they do manage to survive, they may harm the environment.
- 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 and 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).

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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