

## Head start class of turtles getting ready to graduate for release to the wild

**WHAT:** The head start class of 2024's western pond turtles at Woodland Park Zoo has a final goal to reach before they can graduate for release to the wild: be healthy and big enough to escape the mouths of invasive bullfrogs.

On **Thursday, July 25**, approximately 40 of the turtles that were given a head start, from egg to hatchling to turtle, will be weighed and measured. If they are large enough, the juvenile turtles will be released next month to protected wetlands in the state.

As part of the [Western Pond Turtle Recovery Project](#), zoo visitors of all ages will have the special experience of watching Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and Woodland Park Zoo 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.

Every summer, 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 fed a hearty diet throughout the winter safely away from predators. By late summer, they reach the sweet spot of weighing at least 2 ounces—too big to fit in the mouths of bullfrogs—and are larger than wild turtles at that age.

Every August, the juveniles are returned to local protected wetlands and are monitored by WDFW biologists.

**WHEN:** **Press photo op: Thursday, July 25, 10:00 a.m.–noon**

**WHERE:** Enter at Woodland Park Zoo's West Entrance at Phinney Ave. N. between N. 55<sup>th</sup> & N. 56<sup>th</sup> Sts. PR staff will escort press to Cathy Herzig Basecamp Northwest and Turtle Head Start Center.

**INFO:** Western pond turtles (*Actinemys marmorata*) 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.

### 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 it does manage to survive, it 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, 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).

Current zoo hours: 9:30 a.m.–6:00 p.m. daily. 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](#), [Instagram](#) and [TikTok](#).

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