

## PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

For immediate release | August 5, 2024  
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Editor note: For directions to the recovery site, please email [woodlandparkzoo@zoo.org](mailto:woodlandparkzoo@zoo.org) by **August 8, 5:00 p.m.** Or text: 206.707.1648 or 850.596.1916.

Media link for video and photos:  
<https://zoo.resourcespace.com/?c=4092&k=f44aaa205f>

### Head start class of endangered turtles graduate to the wild *Turtles to be released on August 9*



**WHAT:** The head start class of 2024's western pond turtles at Woodland Park Zoo has reached its final goal to graduate: they are healthy and big enough to escape the mouths of invasive bullfrogs. Approximately 20 turtles will be released to protected wetlands on **Friday, August 9**; another 20 were released last week.

Turtles help to balance local wetland ecosystems. As part of the [Western Pond Turtle Recovery Project](#), every summer Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife biologists collect pond turtle 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 hatchlings are fed a hearty diet throughout the fall and winter safely away from predators; and they bask under heat lamps and swim in pools. This fall and winter care allows the hatchlings to invest their time and energy in eating and growing rather than hibernating.

Zoo-goers can see the turtles being cared for in the zoo's Turtle Head Start Center in Cathy Herzig Basecamp Northwest in Living Northwest Trail.

By late summer, the juvenile turtles 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. 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 9, 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 8**. To protect the sensitive habitat, the release site is not publicized.

**WHO:** Approximately 35 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.

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 focused on 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 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).

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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