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Zoo mourns the loss of its geriatric jaguar

SEATTLE—Woodland Park Zoo is mourning the loss of its only female jaguar, Nayla. The big cat was humanely euthanized due to age-related degenerative decline in mobility.

Nayla, who celebrated her 19th birthday last week, was born at Akron Zoo in Ohio and lived at Woodland Park Zoo since 2006. The life expectancy of jaguars in zoos is 18 years.

As a geriatric big cat, Nayla's welfare and chronic medical conditions, including degenerative joint disease, have been closely managed by her animal caregivers and veterinary staff. This summer Nayla had an episode of neurologic deficits that caused a severe head tilt and loss of balance. After diagnostics, including an MRI and treatment, Nayla recovered from this neurologic episode and returned to the habitat, Jaguar Cove.

"Recently Nayla began to display increased weakness and incoordination of her hindlegs causing her to have difficulty jumping, running and turning. Unfortunately, despite changes to her treatment and therapy, she continued to have challenges with her mobility," said Dr. Misty Garcia, associate veterinarian at Woodland Park Zoo. "Though this decision is difficult for the team to make, Nayla's case highlights the dedication of animal care staff to provide excellent animal welfare."

In 2013, Nayla gave birth to three cubs, the only jaguars to be born in Jaguar Cove since it opened in 2003. "It was quite the adventure watching Nayla raise and keep track of her thrill-seeking cubs leaping along the forest floor, wobbling across the trunk of the downed tree or clawing their way up the large rock. Her family added a whole new level of vibrancy to the exhibit and Nayla was a very good mom," said Shawn Pedersen, an animal curator at Woodland Park Zoo. Her cubs continue to thrive at other accredited zoos.

As a standard procedure, the zoo's animal health team will perform a postmortem exam to further diagnose factors that may have contributed to Nayla's death.

For thousands of years, jaguars have symbolized the power of the forest and nature for the native people in its range from the Mayans, Incas and Aztecs to the Guaraní Indians of the Gran Chaco. The very word jaguar is derived from a language spoken in the heart of Amazonia. The Guaraní word "yaguara" means "the animal that kills with one leap."

"During nearly two decades of living at Woodland Park Zoo, Nayla portrayed the strength and power of jaguars. She played like a kitten with a variety of enrichment offerings such as rolling in large piles of cat mint or simply napped in her habitat as felines do. We're going to miss Nayla so much, rest easy our beautiful queen," said Shannon Sprayberry, an animal keeper at Woodland Park Zoo.



Visitors can discover the world of jaguars by visiting Jaguar Cove where the zoo's remaining jaguar, a 7-year-old male named Fitz, lives. Jaguars are solitary animals, choosing to hunt and live alone except for mating season and moms raising cubs.

Zoo officials are working with the Jaguar Species Survival Plan to explore the prospect of bringing another female jaguar to the zoo in the near future. The [Species Survival Plan](#) is a cooperative breeding program across accredited zoos to help ensure a healthy, self-sustaining population of the species.

The jaguar is the third largest cat in the felid family after tigers and lions, and the largest feline in North America. A Near Threatened species under the [IUCN Red List](#), wild jaguars need lots of room to roam. Providing habitat connectivity so that cats can safely travel to find mates and refuge from climate change impacts is critical. Woodland Park Zoo supports the Northern Jaguar Project, which is working to protect priority habitats and identify wildlife corridors for jaguars living in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

For more information about Woodland Park Zoo, visit www.zoo.org or call 206.548.2500. Follow the zoo on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [TikTok](#).

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