



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 3, 2017

## GRAND OPENING OF RENOVATED ROCKY SHORES HABITAT SET FOR MAY 11 AT POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM

*Voter-approved bond funds financed renewal of 35-year-old home to California sea lions, Pacific walruses, harbor seals, sea otters, tufted and horned puffins and common murre*

TACOMA, Wash. – What does a 779-pound California sea lion do when he's introduced to a completely renovated 220,000-gallon pool?



Why he swims fast and deep, hauls out of the water quickly when there are fish involved and barks loudly as sea lions are apt to do.

And when he bellies up to the underwater viewing windows? Well, it's magical.

Chinook, a rescued California sea lion, is just one of the many residents in the newly renovated Rocky Shores habitat at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium.

He and some other animals have been behind-the-scenes while workers renewed their aging home.

Now, it's time for the Big Reveal, and a public Grand Opening is set for 11 a.m. on May 11.

### Grand Opening of Rocky Shores set for 11 a.m. on May 11

**What:** Grand Opening of the renovated Rocky Shores, renewed at a cost of about \$2 million, thanks to Tacoma voters who approved a bond issue in 2014

**Where:** Rocky Shores habitat at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, home to walruses, sea lions, harbor seals, sea otters, and sea birds

Metro Parks Tacoma Board of Commissioners President Andrea Smith is slated to make brief remarks, and Tacoma Rainiers' mascot Rhubarb will bring along his pitching arm to throw out the ceremonial first fish to Chinook.

The grand opening means the zoo's complement of Pacific walruses, California sea lions, harbor seals, sea otters, tufted and horned puffins, and common murre all will enjoy the result of a more than \$2 million makeover that has transformed the 35-year-old Rocky Shores complex.

Visitors will love it, too.

Thanks to the generosity of Tacoma voters, who approved a \$198 million Metro Parks Tacoma bond issue three years ago, Rocky Shores now boasts a number of improvements, including:

- Brand new, crystal-clear underwater viewing windows for enjoying the graceful ballet-like movements of massive walruses;



- Better sight lines for watching the antics of playful sea otters;
- A redesigned home for California sea lions and harbor seals;
- Covered stadium-style seating for watching animals and listening to keeper talks;
- A repaired and renewed 125,500-gallon pool for the zoo's four walruses, featuring more haul-out areas in an exhibit that resembles the features of a rocky coastal area;

**Pacific walrus Dozer, who weighs in at 3,363 pounds, is a visitor favorite as he cozies up to the viewing window in the Rocky Shores habitat at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium. He is one of four Pacific walruses currently in residence. The zoo also is home to females Basilla, Joan and Kulu. There are just 19 walruses in North American zoos and aquariums.**

- Updated graphics and colorful murals that tell the story of interconnectedness between humans and the sea, with messages about how humans can help care for the ocean and the animals that call it home;
- A new wheelchair and stroller friendly pathway that gives visitors a faster trip to the Arctic Tundra home of majestic polar bears.

The work also included crucial updates to the water filtration and animal life-support systems necessary to keep the marine mammals in an optimal salt-water environment. Other modifications added health and safety features for both the animal residents and the zoo staff members who care for them.

“We are delighted with the renovations done at Rocky Shores, and we are grateful to Tacoma voters for their continued support of Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium,” Metro Parks Board of Commissioners President Andrea Smith said. “Zoo visitors have been fortunate to experience marine mammals and sea birds up close at Rocky Shores for 35 years. This renovation ensures that more generations of Tacoma residents will enjoy viewing and learning about these animals.”

It's the first large project completed at the zoo with funds from the 2014 bond issue. The Pacific Seas Aquarium is well under construction next door, and is scheduled to open in the summer of 2018.

The bond issue also has financed projects across the city, including helping to pay for the People's Community Center pool, a new multipurpose field at South End Recreation & Adventure Campus and many smaller projects, with more to come.

At Rocky Shores, staff biologists and members of the zoo's Conservation Engagement team are eager to show off the renewed habitat and delighted with the ways in which it connects visitors even more closely to marine mammals like sea lions, sea otters and harbor seals, plus sea birds that can often be found in our own Puget Sound backyard. Pacific walruses, of course, are native to waters a bit north of us in Arctic and subarctic waters off Alaska.

Coming face-to-face with a 4,000-pound walrus through a viewing window, watching a sea otter groom herself, or hearing the throaty barking of a California sea lion are among the amazing experiences visitors won't soon forget, said Conservation Engagement Manager Karen Povey.

"Now, we've put a sharpened focus on what these animals can teach us and how our actions affect the ocean and shore we share with them," she added.

"We want visitors to know more about the high quality of care Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium provides for the animals that live here, as well about conservation actions we all can take to help their counterparts in the wild."

Alan Varsik, director of Zoological and Environmental Education for Metro Parks Tacoma, hopes visitors will go home knowing more about the zoo's long legacy of marine animal conservation.

That history has included providing a home for orphaned animals like walruses and sea otters; research to

advance scientific knowledge of marine mammals; and participation in Species Survival Plan® programs to increase species populations in North American zoos and aquariums.

And the zoo – through The Zoo Society's Dr. Holly Reed Wildlife Conservation Fund – has helped fund a number of marine mammal conservation projects, including partnering to support studies at the Alaska Department of Fish and Wildlife's walrus sanctuary at Round Island.

"All of this work, all of this passion is on exhibit every day at Rocky Shores," Varsik said. "We hope that visitors will come and enjoy the animals, learn from our staff and leave inspired to take conservation action."

###

*Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest's only combined zoo and aquarium, practices and promotes responsible stewardship of the world's resources through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities. The zoo, a division of Metro Parks Tacoma, is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA).*

#### **Contacts**

Kris Sherman, 253-404-3800; 253-226-6718 or [kris.sherman@pdza.org](mailto:kris.sherman@pdza.org)

Whitney DalBalcon, 253-404-3637; 253-278-6343 or [whitney.dalbalcon@pdza.org](mailto:whitney.dalbalcon@pdza.org)

