



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** July 26, 2016

**SPLISH, SPLASH, WE'RE HAVING A SUMMER BLAST AT POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM**  
*California sea lion makes his public debut on Wednesday, July 27*

TACOMA, Wash. – There's a whole lot of splishin' and splashin' goin' on over in the Rocky Shores area at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium. Chinook, an 800-pound California sea lion, will make his official public debut at 9:30 a.m. on Wednesday. He will be swimming in the just-renovated main pool at Rocky Shores.



California sea lion Chinook gets a fish reward during a training session in the Rocky Shores area at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium. He goes on official public exhibit beginning at 9:30 a.m. on Wednesday, July 27.



California sea lion Chinook, who weighs 800 pounds, takes a tour of the main pool in the Rocky Shores area at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium. Visitors should be able to watch him from both the underwater viewing area and the above-water viewing area. He is scheduled to be on exhibit from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. each day, though that schedule is subject to change.

For now, the large male sea lion will split time in the pool with Pacific walruses Joan and Basilla.

Chinook is scheduled to swim in the pool from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. daily; they are slated to be on exhibit from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. each day. The schedule could change according to the animals' needs.

Two California sea lion buddies, 180-pound Neah and 180-pound Matia (pronounced May-sha), are scheduled to join Chinook on exhibit later this year.

Chinook represents the wonderful kinds of conservation stories for which Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium is known. He grew up in Washington but was moved to an aquatic facility in California for several years as part of an effort to save endangered salmon stocks in the Columbia River.

He was among a group of sea lions with voracious appetites for the fish as they returned to their homes to spawn, so he was captured and relocated. The distinctive brand on his back was placed there by National Marine Fisheries officials both as a way to study marine mammals long term and to identify those predatory sea lions who were depleting stocks of endangered salmon.

Now, at 16, he's back home in the Northwest as an ambassador for his species and the health of Puget Sound. Females Neah and Matia are each about 12. They were rescued as orphans. None of the three is releasable to the wild.

California sea lions range from the waters of Prince William Sound in Alaska down through the Puget Sound region, all along the western coast of the United States and into Mexico.



California sea lion Chinook at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium.

Mandy Betz, a Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium staff biologist who helps care for the trio, is thrilled the public will be able to see them up close in the Rocky Shores area of the zoo.

“This is an animal that we can glimpse off of Owen Beach and out in Commencement Bay,” Betz said. “We share our shores with sea lions and hope that their presence at the zoo will inspire our visitors to help protect Puget Sound.”

Rocky Shores is home to a number of marine mammals, including Pacific walruses, harbor seals, Southern sea otters, and California sea lions.

These animal ambassadors help zoo staff teach visitors about the perils that face many species in the wild; the need to maintain healthy oceans; and the importance of actions people can take to help reduce pollution and combat depletion of fish and other sea creatures in the world’s oceans.

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium sets an example by feeding its animals seafood that is harvested using ocean-friendly fishing practices.

Since healthy oceans are plentiful with fishes of all varieties, members of the public can help by looking for and choosing sustainably harvested seafood in grocery stores and at restaurants. More information on this important action is available at [www.seafoodwatch.org](http://www.seafoodwatch.org).

In need of inspiration for ways to help make our oceans more healthy – or just seeking a bit of fun? Come and watch Chinook splishin’ and splashin’ at Rocky Shores. Learn more at [www.pdza.org/sealions](http://www.pdza.org/sealions).

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium is open daily from 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.

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*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, 253-226-6718, 253-404-3800 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)