

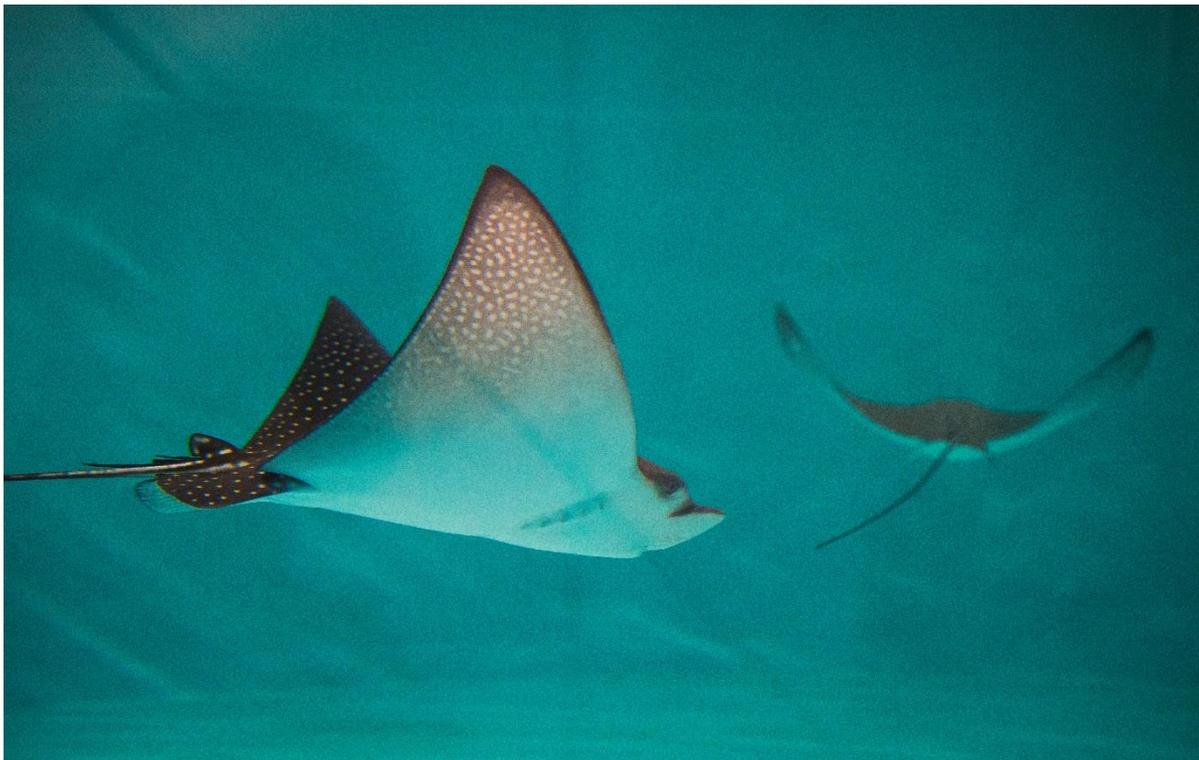


FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Aug.15, 2017

FIRST HAMMERHEAD SHARKS AND EAGLE RAYS ARRIVE AT POINT DEFIANCE ZOO

The animals will be among the stars of the 250,000-gallon Baja Bay exhibit in the new Pacific Seas Aquarium, which will open next summer; in the meantime, they're swimming in a specially constructed off-exhibit space

TACOMA, Wash. - Four healthy scalloped hammerhead sharks are darting to and fro in newly constructed, carefully monitored tanks off exhibit at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium.



They eagerly vacuum up the chopped squid and fish they're fed, swimming swiftly in circles as they home in on their dinner.

Next door, two juvenile spotted eagle rays appear more like participants in a water ballet, gently flapping their wings as they swoop in to snare up the manila clams that are their favored food, crunching them up – shells and all.

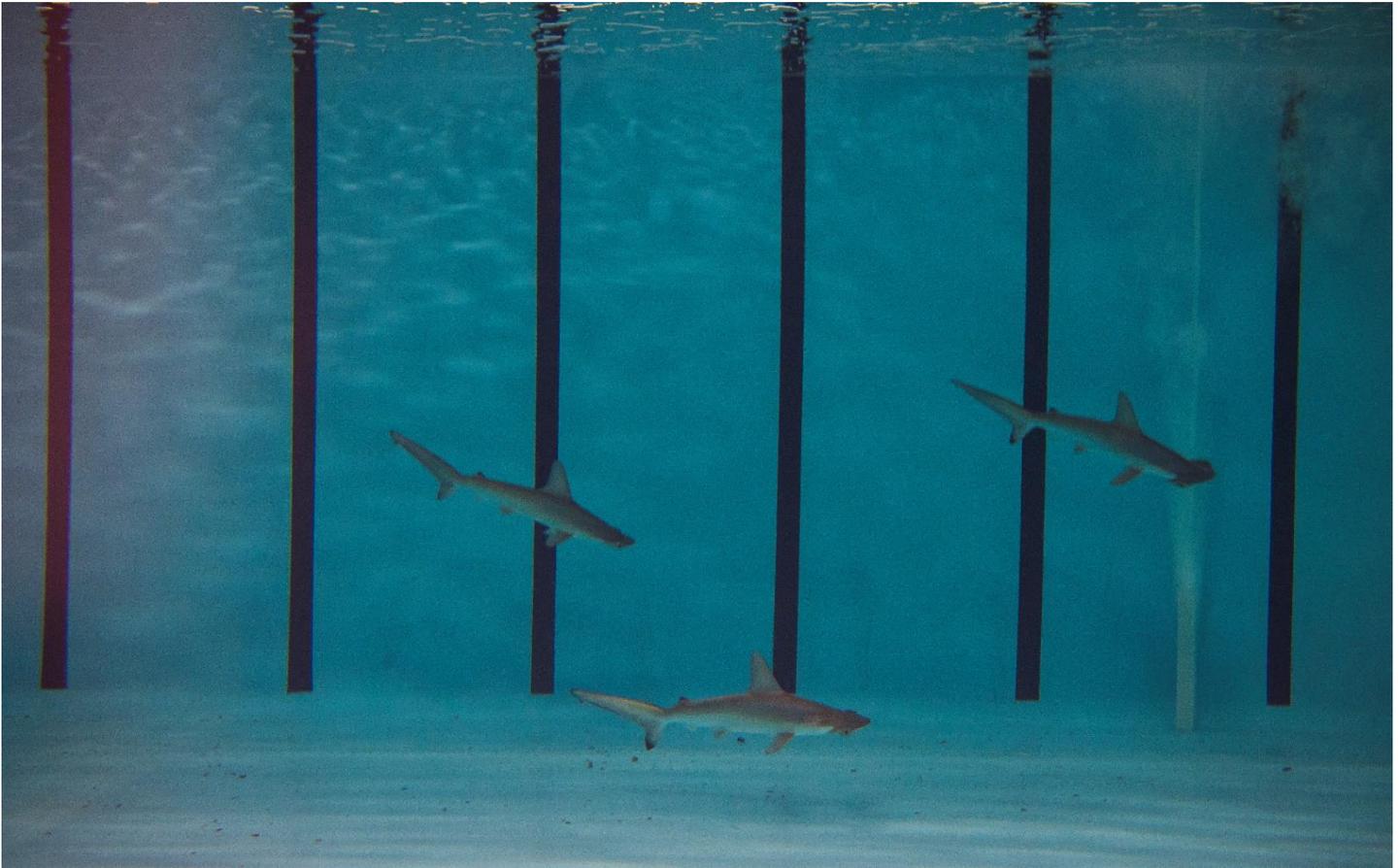
Two spotted eagle rays swim in their temporary new home at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium. They are one of three exciting new species of marine animals that will be showcased in the 250,000-gallon Baja Bay exhibit of the new Pacific Seas Aquarium, which is scheduled to open next summer.

By this time next year, they will all be swimming in an even larger 250,000 gallon home: the Baja Bay centerpiece of the now-under-construction Pacific Seas Aquarium. The six animals were transferred to their temporary new homes over the weekend in a highly choreographed operation that entailed shipping them from Hawaii to Sea-Tac in six specially constructed, water-filled tanks and trucking them to Tacoma.

Some two dozen staff members – including 12 aquarists and three veterinarians - eagerly awaited their arrival and stood ready to quickly open the containers and carefully slip the sharks and rays into the climate-and-pH-controlled waters of their temporary home.

“We are delighted this operation went as smoothly as it did,” said Neil Allen, Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium’s curator of aquatic animals. “They are healthy, beautiful animals, and they are being cared for by an extraordinary staff. I am super proud of the aquarium team.”

Allen should know. He is a veteran marine biologist who helped open the Monterey Bay Aquarium, Colorado’s Ocean Journey and the Georgia Aquarium.



Juvenile scalloped hammerhead sharks swim in a 40-foot-long-by-20-foot-wide, off-exhibit tank at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium. The lines in the background help them to navigate their way around. The newly arrived sharks will eventually swim in the Baja Bay exhibit of the new Pacific Seas Aquarium, due to open next summer.

He also has trained and supervised hundreds of staff members in the care of aquatic animals during a career that stretches across more than three decades.

In the coming weeks, two more scalloped hammerhead sharks and four additional eagle rays are scheduled to arrive at the zoo. Green sea turtles also are slated to come to Tacoma. The sharks, rays and sea turtles are three exciting species that have never before been part of the Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium aquatic family.

“The arrival of these animals is the second milestone in the course of one week toward the eventual opening of the long-awaited Pacific Seas Aquarium,” said John Houck, the zoo’s deputy director. “We are grateful to the voters of Tacoma who made construction of the Pacific Seas Aquarium possible with their passage of a \$198 million Metro Parks Tacoma bond issue in 2014.”

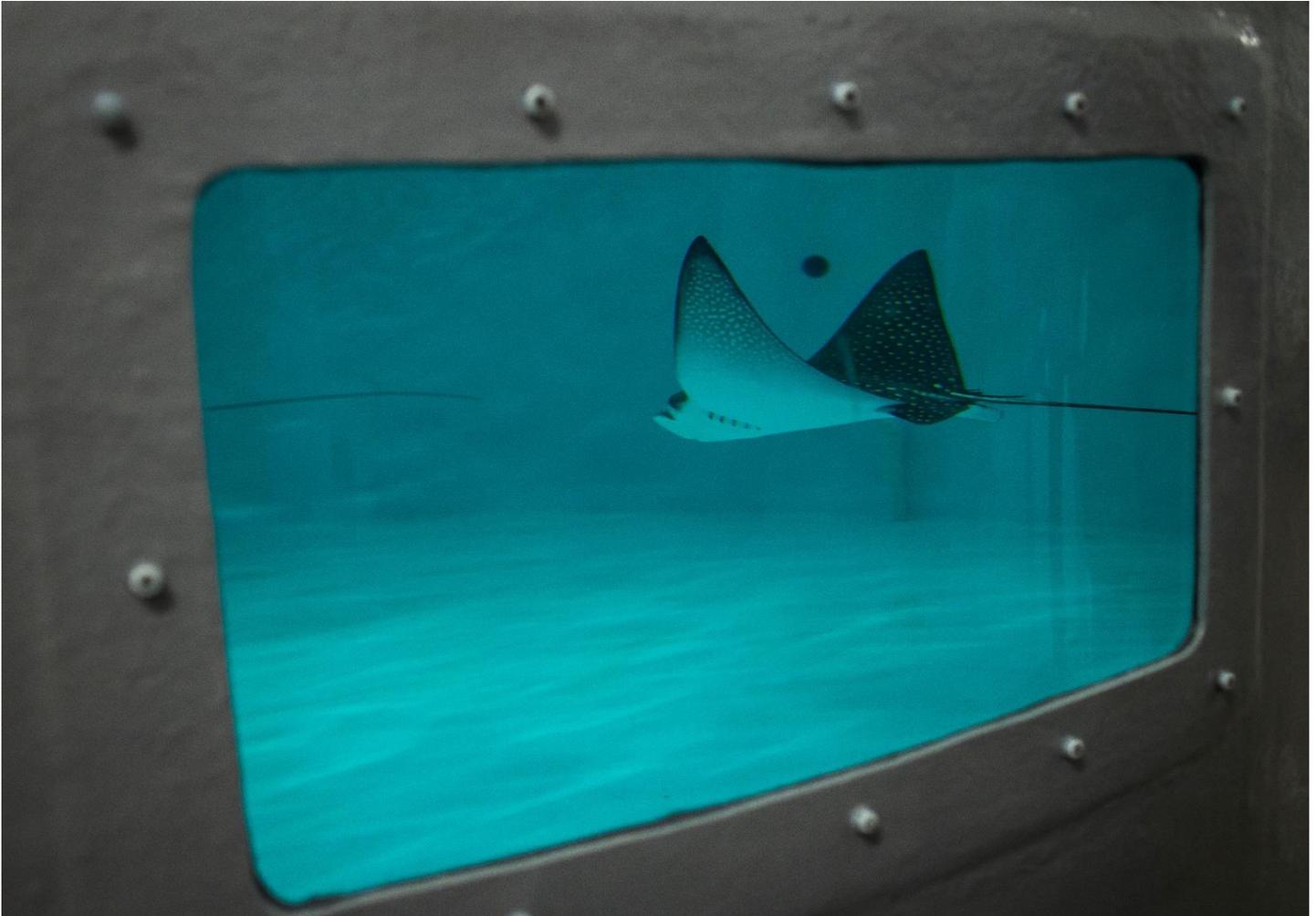
That bond issue is paying for the bulk of the \$51.6 million, 35,000-square-foot aquarium, which will replace the aging and deteriorating North Pacific Aquarium.

Last Wednesday, a construction crew installed the 23,500-pound, 30-plus-foot-long piece of crystal-clear acrylic that will provide visitors with a window into Baja Bay. It will arch overhead, so visitors will feel immersed in the world of animals that live along the Baja California coast.

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium worked with a marine biologist in Hawaii to obtain the juvenile scalloped hammerhead sharks from a popular “pupping ground” in Kaneohe Bay off the Island of Oahu. The sharks, each about 2-foot-long, came to Tacoma under a special permit issued by the state of Hawaii, Allen said. The pupping ground is a sustainable fishery, with strict protocols for their

collection and transport.

Adult scalloped hammerheads generally grow to about 7 feet, according to the State of Hawaii's Department of Land and Natural Resources Shark Identification Guide. Adults live off shore but venture into Kaneohe Bay, Waimea Bay, Hilo Bay and other areas of Hawaii to bear their live young.



A spotted eagle ray swims in a 20-foot diameter tank at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium. Windows allow aquarists (zookeepers trained in the care of aquatic animals) to keep a close watch on the animals until it's time to move them into the now-under-construction Baja Bay exhibit at the Pacific Seas Aquarium, which is scheduled to open next summer.

For now, the juvenile hammerheads are swimming in a 40-foot-long, 20-foot-wide tank that gives the little sharks plenty of room to glide and make the sharp turns that are part of their nature.

"I'm very pleased with their overall condition," said Dr. Karen Wolf, the zoo's head veterinarian. "All of the sharks and rays immediately adjusted beautifully to their new homes. They are eating well and showing natural swimming patterns."

Once inside Baja Bay, the Hawaiian sharks will represent their endangered cousins in other parts of the world, including the Gulf of California.

The just-arrived male and female spotted eagle rays are about 2 ½-feet from wingtip to wingtip and weigh approximately 15 pounds each. They were born a year ago.

The Baja Bay exhibit will tell the story of the animals that live in the Gulf of California between Baja California and the Mexican mainland. The scalloped hammerheads, spotted eagle rays, green sea turtles and other animals in the Pacific Seas Aquarium are ambassadors for their species and will help zoo staff explain the threats to these animals in the wild.

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium is active in shark conservation on many fronts. The Zoo Society's Dr. Holly Reed Wildlife Conservation Fund supports shark-tagging activities that help marine biologists track sharks' movements in the wild to learn more about them and add to the body of scientific knowledge.

And the zoo's popular Eye-to-Eye Shark Dive program helps visitors learn about the wonder of sharks, their importance in the ecology of the ocean and the severe threats they face in the wild.

For more information, go to www.pdza.org.

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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).

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