



IN OUR HANDS

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IN OUR HANDS: POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM JOINS WITH 18 OTHER AQUARIUMS NATIONWIDE TO DRAW ATTENTION TO THE GRAVE AND GROWING PROBLEM OF PLASTIC POLLUTION IN THE OCEAN

TACOMA, Wash. – Plastic bags. Microplastics. Microfibers. They and other forms of plastic trash are clogging our ocean so much that some scientists estimate there will be more plastic than fish in the sea within a few decades.



In 2010, a gray whale died after stranding on a Seattle beach; the animal's stomach was full of human trash – including more than 20 plastic bags. Scientists at the Center for Urban Waters in Tacoma found microplastics – small bits of colored plastic pieces – all over Puget Sound and on the coast of Vancouver Island during their research in recent years.

Humans and their plastic waste are causing a grave threat to our oceans, waterways and the marine life that live there. And humans can take steps to correct it.

Natasha Turtle rides a wave of plastic bags and other plastic garbage that washed up on Northwest beaches. She is part of the **Washed Ashore: Art to Save the Sea** exhibit at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium through Oct. 21. The exhibit calls attention to the growing dilemma of plastic pollution in the world's waterways.

The solution is In Our Hands. www.ourhands.org.

Today (Monday, July 10) Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium is joining Seattle Aquarium and 17 other aquariums across the nation to launch an unprecedented campaign to highlight the growing problem of plastic pollution in our ocean and waterways. The In Our Hands campaign carries an urgent plea from the newly formed Aquarium Conservation Partnership, which is urging consumers to skip straws, ditch single-use plastic bags, say no to plastic water and soda bottles and put more reusable products into their daily lives.



“These are small actions that can yield huge results,” said Karen Povey, Conservation Engagement Manager for the Zoological and Environmental Education division of Metro Parks Tacoma. “At Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium and Northwest Trek Wildlife Park, we are already ‘walking the talk,’ Povey added.

In cooperation with vendor Lancer Hospitality, Point Defiance Zoo and Northwest Trek eliminated the sale of single-use plastic water and soda bottles on site earlier this year.

Visitors are encouraged to bring reusable bottles and fill them up with water at drinking fountains

and special refilling stations.

“Eliminating the sale of water and soda in plastic bottles affects our bottom line,” said zoo Deputy Director John Houck.

“But we took this bold step because we are an environmental leader in the community, and we must step up as a role model. Plastics are polluting our waterways, clogging our ocean and harming sea life at an alarming rate. We must learn to say no to our human addiction to plastics.”

Both zoos long ago eliminated the use of plastic drink lids and straws because of the potential harm to wildlife.

Top: A Conservation Engagement staff member at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium shows a container of

plastic gleaned from beaches to a visitor. The photo she holds illustrates the devastation plastics can have on sea life. Above: Sturdy reusable are available for sale in the gift shops at the zoo and Northwest Trek Wildlife Park; they are free for purchases above a certain dollar amount.



The sister zoos, working with Wildlife Trading Co., also no longer offer single-use plastic bags in their gift shops.

In a happy coincidence of timeliness, the In Our Hands campaign begins just two days before the City of Tacoma’s ban on single-use plastic bags takes effect. The city’s Bring Your Own Bag initiative encourages people to take reusable bags with them when they shop for groceries and other items.

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium in Tacoma and Northwest Trek Wildlife Park near Eatonville are owned and operated by Metro Parks Tacoma.



A water bottle filling station at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium.

All 19 aquariums also are supporting this shift away from single-use plastic within their own businesses. All have eliminated plastic straws and single-use plastic take-away bags.

And all are committed to significantly reducing or eliminating plastic beverage bottles by 2020 and showcasing alternatives to single-use plastic for guests. Point Defiance Zoo & Northwest Trek are well ahead of this curve.

Both began urging visitors to Go Plastic-Free to Save Our Sea earlier this year with a range of messages and practical advice about how to find - and use - alternatives to disposable straws, single-use water bottles, disposable lunch containers, plastic sandwich bags and other items.

Now, both are participating in the Aquarium Conservation Partnership campaign to raise further awareness through the In Our Hands project.

Scientists agree that far too many plastic items escape the waste and recycling streams, finding their way to the ocean through rivers and stormwater.

About 8.8 million tons of plastic enters the ocean each year worldwide – roughly a dump truck full of plastic every minute of every day. In the United States alone, plastic waste averages more than 200 pounds per person each year. If nothing changes, by 2025 the flow of plastic into the ocean is expected to double. Over time, much of this plastic will be churned into tiny bits of microplastics, but it will never, ever go away.

In Our Hands is not just a consumer campaign; it's a business commitment by aquariums from coast to coast to shift away from single-use plastic among visitors, in their communities and beyond.

“The public trusts aquariums to do what’s right for the health of the ocean and for ocean wildlife,” said Julie Packard, executive director of the Monterey Bay Aquarium. “We’re just beginning to understand the full impacts of ocean plastic pollution on ecosystems, marine life and human health. But we already know enough to say that now is the time to act.”

Through the In Our Hands campaign, the Aquarium Conservation Partnership hopes to empower 20 million visitors and millions more in their communities to drive a national movement away from single-use plastic and toward innovative alternatives. The campaign includes the website www.ourhands.org that inspires visitors to make positive everyday behavior changes and raise awareness of the issue.

Click on the link, and you immediately see the powerful question: “What if the ocean had more plastic than fish?”

“As leaders in aquatic conservation, aquariums are expected to walk their talk, and that’s exactly what this partnership is meant to do,” said John Racanelli, CEO of the National Aquarium. “We are uniquely qualified to set an example for others—in reducing our plastic footprint, encouraging sustainable operating practices, and inspiring hope in a public that is hungry to be part of the solution. We’re right where we should be.”

The Aquarium Conservation Partnership was first championed by Monterey Bay Aquarium in California, National Aquarium in Baltimore and Shedd Aquarium in Chicago, in collaboration with the Association of Zoos & Aquariums. Coalition partners are located in 16 states.

These aquariums are using their collective voice – at the local, state and national level – to support policies that reduce the flow of plastic pollution into the ocean, rivers and lakes. Beyond sponsoring clean-up events and education programs, many have backed successful efforts to stem the use of plastic shopping bags and plastic microbeads found in personal care products.

“By using our voice with our visitors and in our communities, our collective buying power and our relationships with our vendors, we can make a big difference on a pressing issue that threatens the health of wildlife in the ocean, lakes and rivers,” Povey said. “The solution to plastic pollution really is in our hands.”

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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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About the Aquarium Conservation Partnership

The Aquarium Conservation Partnership (ACP) is a collaboration of 19 AZA-accredited public aquariums across North America committed to advancing conservation and advocacy of the world’s oceans, lakes and rivers through public action, business leadership and policy changes aimed at addressing major threats to aquatic environments.

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