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MEDIA ADVISORY

"Sealed" with a kiss: Male harbor seal Q is coming to Tacoma with love in his heart, and a harem awaits him. Zoo staff hoping for happy mating – and a pup.

What:

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium will welcome Q, a 13-year-old male from Seattle Aquarium to woo the Tacoma zoo's two breeding-age females, Shila and Qilak. Seattle Aquarium will in turn receive 7-year-old Siku as a mate for 27-year-old Barney. Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium and Seattle Aquarium are cooperatively trading the harbor seals for breeding in an effort to increase zoo-based populations. Neither Q nor Barney has fathered any pups.

When:

Thursday, April 26, 10 a.m.

Where:

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, 5400 N. Pearl St., Tacoma Meet Kris at the zoo's Gate 6 (in Point Defiance Park across from the picnic/pavilion play area)

Visuals:

- Male harbor seal Q arriving by van from Seattle Aquarium. Staff unloading his kennel
 and releasing him into the main public-viewing pool at the Rocky Shores exhibit, so he
 can immediately get acquainted with his new harem of four female seals. He'll also
 explore his new spacious digs and get a fishy meal to seal his welcome. Once he's
 settled, female harbor seal Siku will be moved in her kennel to the van for transport to
 Seattle and her pairing with Barney.
- Interview with Lisa Triggs, zoo senior staff biologist who helps care for Point Defiance Zoo's five harbor seals.

Background:

Zoo and aquarium officials are working cooperatively to increase stocks of harbor seals in AZA facilities. Allowing Q to attempt breeding with the Point Defiance Zoo females and Siku to attempt mating with Barney is aimed at building larger population numbers and a diverse gene pool among harbor seals. Siku, Shila and Qilak arrived at Point Defiance Zoo three years ago from the Alaska SeaLife Center, where they had been part of a research program. Blackie has been at the zoo since 1976, Louise since 1988. (We believe these two animals are post-reproductive).

About harbor seals

Common name: Harbor seal

Scientific name: Phoca vitulina ("sea calf" or "sea dog")

At Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium: 5 females: Blackie, 36; Louise, 35; Shila, 7; Qilak, 8; Siku, 7.

At Seattle Aquarium: 2 males: Barney, 27: Q, 13.

The seal swap: Q is coming to Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium in the hope of breeding with two of the zoo's females; Siku is moving to Seattle Aquarium to mate with Barney.

Appearance: Color varies, but harbor seals often are a bluish/blackish gray with light and dark speckles. They have short, dog-like snouts and "haul out" on land with heads and rear flippers elevated.

Height and weight range:

Males: 150 to 375 pounds; 5 to 6 feet; Q is 190 pounds Females: 100 to 300 pounds; 4 to 5 feet; Siku is 120 pounds

Lifespan in the wild: Average is 25 years

Boy, can they swim: Harbor seals can dive up to 1,200 feet and remain under water for about 30 minutes while hunting, though their dives generally last only a few minutes.

They snooze under water, too: Harbor seals can take naps on land or just below the water surface, coming up to breathe every five to 10 minutes, all without completely waking up.

Range: Pacific harbor seals are found north of the equator in the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. On the West Coast, they range from Alaska to Baja California – including our own backyard of

Puget Sound. They live in near-shore coastal waters and frequent rocky islands, sandy beaches, mudflats, bays and estuaries.

Captive population in North America: About 200 in approximately 50 zoos and aquariums.

Reproduction: Male harbor seals may mate with several females. Mating season generally runs from spring through fall. Gestation period is nine to 11 months, with one pup born per year.

Fun Puget Sound fact: They are the most abundant marine mammal in the Sound. There are about 1,000 to 2,000 harbor seals in Southern Puget Sound.

Protection: Harbor seals are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

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