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**Watch endangered clouded leopards leap and climb in Point Defiance Zoo's new exhibit
*Zoo opens \$1 million exhibit Aug. 27 and 28 with weekend of activities***

Tacoma, Wash. – Visitors to Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium will be able to witness the unparalleled climbing skills of endangered clouded leopards in the new Cats of the Canopy exhibit, which will officially open this weekend, Aug. 27 and 28.

“These guys are fearless,” said zoo deputy director John Houck. “But they are also quite secretive and endangered in the wild so being able to see them in a setting similar to their natural environment is a unique opportunity.”

Clouded leopards can launch themselves over tree tops, run at top speed down tree trunks – head first! – and climb across branches upside down.

Now the new Cats of the Canopy exhibit offers the zoo's clouded leopards a tree-filled vertical playground perfect for showing off. A cozy shelter will offer peek-a-boo views of the cats so visitors can glimpse the clouded leopards up close.

The new space also marks a significant commitment to increasing the population of this endangered species. It includes a cub room, put to use sooner than expected with the births of cubs Taji and Sumalee in June, and an extensive behind-the-scenes holding area built especially for breeding.

“It's more than an exhibit at the zoo,” Houck said. “It's a concentrated effort to help in the survival and conservation of this extraordinary species.” Point Defiance Zoo is one of only three zoos in the country breeding endangered clouded leopards, along with the Smithsonian Institution's National Zoo and the Nashville Zoo.

The Tacoma zoo is home to eight clouded leopards. Six cats are part of the new exhibit, including two adult pairs – Chai Li and Nah Fun, and Chee Wit and Jao Ying – and two cubs Taji and Sumalee. The two other cats, Raja and Josie, live at the zoo behind-the-scenes.

Constructing Cats of the Canopy cost \$1 million. Funding for the project comes from The Zoo Society Vision for the Future capital campaign.

“Zoo visitors have connected with these clouded leopards and have been very supportive of the creation of this new exhibit,” said Zoo Society executive director Caryl Zenker. “We hope they’ll enjoy seeing their contributions at work as these rare and beautiful cats settle into their new home.” Zenker said the Zoo Society has already raised 94 percent of its \$7.15 million campaign goal, including \$2 million in 2005 park bonds, and fundraising will continue.

“Even in these challenging economic times, our community has stepped up with some of the largest gifts in the zoo’s history,” said campaign co-chair Tina De Falco. “The zoo continues to be one of the most accessible and popular places for families to learn and play together.”

Grand opening activities are scheduled throughout the weekend to help visitors learn about these mysterious cats. Visitors can create their own clouded leopard tails and then climb and jump their way through a clouded leopard challenge course. They also can learn what it takes to study these cats as field biologists.

Clouded leopards live mostly in the forests of Southeast Asia. But massive clear cutting to make way for the expansion of palm oil plantations has threatened their populations. Exactly how many clouded leopards exist is unknown because the secretive cats are so hard to study.

Point Defiance Zoo has already played a large role in clouded leopard conservation, participating in a cooperative effort with zoos across the nation to study and breed the animals.

Zoo staff biologist Andy Goldfarb spends two months each year at the Khao Kheow Open Zoo in Thailand managing the clouded leopard breeding program and teaching animal husbandry skills to staff there. In addition to her work at the zoo, zoo associate curator of education Karen Povey founded and oversees the Clouded Leopard Project, a non-profit organization that supports field research, education initiatives and global awareness.

Zoo visitors can also help alleviate the plight of clouded leopards. The Cats of the Canopy exhibit includes information about sustainable palm oil products and offers opportunities to donate money to conservation efforts.

The exhibit, located in the zoo’s Asian Forest Sanctuary, is free with admission. For information on zoo hours and admission rates, go to www.pdza.org. To learn more about the Zoo Society’s Vision for the Future capital campaign, visit www.greatcommunitygreatzoo.org

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium 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).

