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Zoo wins nation's top conservation award

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Thirty-five years ago, only 14 Red wolves roamed the planet. Since then, that number has grown to more than 250, and today Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium earned a national award for its contribution to that growth.

In 1987, Point Defiance made the first attempt in history to restore a species that was extinct in the wild. The Zoo released four adult Red wolf pairs into their natural habitat 14 years after starting its breeding project in 1973. The year 2007 marks the 20th anniversary of that release and the 30th anniversary of the first Red wolf litter born at the zoo.

In honor of this anniversary and in recognition of the success of the project, the Red Wolf Recovery Program received the North America Conservation Award from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). Will Waddell, a zoo employee since 1984 and the Red Wolf Program coordinator for 14 years, accepted the award.

The AZA presents four awards each year, and Point Defiance won the Education Award and Munson Aquatic Conservation Exhibit Award last year bringing the Zoo's total to three of the four major awards in the past two years.

As keynote speaker, former U.S. Secretary of the Interior and current President of the World Wildlife Fund Bruce Babbitt spoke about current conservation efforts. He stressed the importance of captive breeding and emphasized the unique position of zoos and aquariums to make a distinct difference.

"It is such an honor to be recognized for the Zoo's efforts in conservation," said Gary Geddes, director of zoological and environmental education for Metro Parks Tacoma. "The Red Wolf Recovery Program is a great, tangible example of how zoos and aquariums can use that unique position to restore a wildlife population."

Point Defiance and Metro Parks Tacoma are currently seeking federal funding to move the Red wolf breeding project to land recently acquired by Northwest Trek Wildlife Park.

Timeline

1970s	Only 14 pure Red wolves in the wild
1973	Red wolf listed as endangered species and 1 st recovery plan approved
1977	1 st Red wolf pups born in a zoo at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium

1980 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service declares the Red wolf extinct in the wild
1987 4 pair of Red wolf released into the wild
1988 1st Red wolf pups born in the wild
2007 Red wolf population is more than 250
Sept. 19, 2007 Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium wins North America Conservation Award

Come celebrate the Red wolf

National Wolf Awareness Week is Oct. 14-20. To kick it off, Point Defiance will hold Wolf Fest on Saturday Oct. 13 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. The fun-filled day includes games, educational activities, and even a Howl-a-Thon to connect children with the Red wolf. The Zoo will host a public lecture later in the week to give adult Red wolf fans a chance to learn more.

For more information about Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, visit www.pdza.org or call 253-591-5337.

About the North America Conservation Award (from the AZA)

The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) names conservation as its highest priority, and recognizes exceptional efforts by AZA institution, related organization, or society members toward regional habitat preservation, species restoration, and support of biodiversity in the wild through its Regional Conservation Award. Regional efforts include those within the submitting institution's country or local bioclimatic / geographic area which may only include foreign countries contiguous to those areas.

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest's only Zoo & Aquarium, is located in Tacoma's beautiful Point Defiance Park, 5400 North Pearl Street. 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).