

Press Release
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Zoo closely monitors health of beluga whale

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TACOMA – A team of veterinarians and animal care staff is closely monitoring the health of Beethoven, a beluga whale at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium.

Diagnostic tests show the 14-year-old whale has a bacterial infection, and he has shown a loss of appetite. Zoo veterinarians and animal care staff are working with veterinarians from SeaWorld, which owns Beethoven, to provide him with comprehensive, aggressive medical therapy. Beethoven is active and alert; his condition is considered stable.

Veterinarians suspect that the bacteria is from the same source as the bacteria that made Beethoven's half-brother, Turner, ill. Turner succumbed to a severe infection on Sept. 7. The veterinarians are looking for potential environmental or viral components, but so far have not found any.

"Yes, we're concerned, but we're also optimistic," said Deputy Director John Houck. "Unlike Turner, whose health was fragile for a number of years, Beethoven is a strong, healthy whale. We have the best marine mammal vets in the country working on his care."

Because Beethoven is undergoing medical treatment, visitors may not always be able to see him.

"We need the public's patience and support as we try to find answers about Beethoven's condition," said Aquatic Curator John Rupp. "Beethoven's health and well-being have to come first."

Children who wish to send get-well cards for Beethoven may send them to:

Beethoven
c/o Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium
5400 N. Pearl St.
Tacoma, WA 98407

Preliminary necropsy results show that Turner died of acute liver failure.

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Susan Hulbert,
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Veterinarians are still awaiting test results that may explain his death more fully. Turner experienced an illness as a young juvenile that left him with a chronic kidney condition and compromised immune system. Beethoven has not had any chronic health issues.

Both whales came to Tacoma on loan from the SeaWorld park in San Antonio in 1998 as part of a cooperative whale breeding program within accredited zoos and aquariums.

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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 and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums.