



GARY GEDDES TO RETIRE IN JANUARY, LEAVING A LEGACY OF CONSERVATION AND GROWTH AT NORTHWEST TREK WILDLIFE PARK AND POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM

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TACOMA, Wash. – When Gary Geddes arrived in Eatonville in 1981, Northwest Trek Wildlife Park was just six years old, and drew an attendance of 103,676 for the year.



Nineteen years later, when he was appointed director of Zoological and Environmental Education for Metro Parks Tacoma – and thus became director for Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium – the zoo’s attendance was about 510,000.

Now, as he prepares to retire after 35 years with Metro Parks Tacoma, both zoos are thriving, robust organizations, showcasing endangered and threatened species while educating the community about the animals.

Each has a nationally recognized record of excellence in conservation work. And both recently set all-time attendance records.

Geddes, 66, announced today he will retire on Jan. 9, 2017. He plans to spend time with his family, indulge in his passion for the outdoors and continue working as a local volunteer.

“Although I am leaving one conservation organization of which I am extremely proud, I will remain active in the community and find new ways to participate in the protection of wildlife and the environment,” Geddes said. “Most importantly, I’ll have more time to spend with my family, particularly my growing grandchildren.”

Jack Wilson, Executive Director of Metro Parks Tacoma for the past 17 years, praised Geddes’ commitment to the community, to wildlife conservation, and to his staff in the Zoological and Environmental Education Department of the park district.

“Gary Geddes has made a significant contribution to this community as a result of his leadership and dedication to the mission of Northwest Trek and Point Defiance Zoo,” Wilson said. “These two facilities are among the very best accredited zoos in the nation.”

A decision on how and when to fill Geddes’ position will be made later.

Northwest Trek celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2015 and set an all-time annual attendance record of 214,697. It broke that record earlier this month, which means every day it's open for the rest of the year will add to the new record.

"It is gratifying to know how far we have come with new exhibits, accreditation, professional staff and conservation programs," Geddes said.

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium also set an attendance record in 2015, with 732,208 visitors passing through its turnstiles. When Geddes gained overall responsibility for the zoo in 2000, attendance was around 510,000.

Last year, the zoo and Northwest Trek each received the Quarter Century Award from the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA), honoring them for more than 25 years of continuous accreditation through rigorous inspection processes that occur every five years.

During Geddes' tenure, the conservation legacies of both zoos grew right along with their attendance. In recent years, Northwest Trek was twice awarded the prestigious North American Conservation Award from the AZA for programs to save the endangered Oregon spotted frog and the Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit.

In addition, Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium is a conservation partner in a number of worldwide efforts to save endangered species. The Zoo Society's Dr. Holly Reed Wildlife Conservation Fund, using donations from zoo visitors, members and others, has awarded more than \$1.2 million to conservation research and wildlife protection efforts at home and abroad over the last 14 years.

The zoo is the national leader in bringing the endangered red wolf back from the brink of extinction and is known across the nation and around the world for its participation in a number of Species Survival Programs®, including the addition of many Sumatran tiger and clouded leopard cubs to the zoo-based populations of those animals.

"In each of these cases where we've succeeded, it's been through the hard work, expertise and intellect of a very talented group of employees who care deeply about the conservation of species and protection of the environment," Geddes said.

In addition to his work at the zoo and Northwest Trek, Geddes is respected by his industry peers.

"Like many of his colleagues, Gary Geddes has dedicated his professional career to advancing efforts to save wildlife from extinction and educating the public about what is necessary to do that," said Kris Vehrs, Interim President and CEO of the AZA. "Whether it is tiger or shark or elephant conservation, Gary has supported efforts to contribute to important wildlife conservation projects."

That legacy will continue for future generations. Construction is underway on the \$51.6 million, 35,000-square-foot Pacific Seas Aquarium, which will open in 2018 to replace the aging North Pacific Aquarium. And renovations are in progress at the Rocky Shores area of the zoo, home to walruses, California sea lions, sea otters, tufted puffins and common murre.

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Northwest Trek, accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums, is a 725-acre zoological park dedicated to conservation, education and recreation by displaying, interpreting and researching native Northwest wildlife and their natural habitats. The wildlife park is a facility of Metro Parks Tacoma and is located 35 miles southeast of Tacoma off State Highway 161.

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 division of Metro Parks Tacoma, is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA).

Contacts

Kris Sherman, 253-404-3800; 253-226-6718 or kris.sherman@pdza.org

Whitney DalBalcon, 253-404-3637 or whitney.dalbalcon@pdza.org