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### **POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM WINS PRESTIGIOUS FIVE-YEAR ACCREDITATION**

*Association of Zoos & Aquariums gives zoo overall excellent marks in animal care; praises facilities, staff morale*

TACOMA, Wash. – Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium received a five-year accreditation renewal Monday from the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) at the group's national conference in Phoenix, Ariz.

"Only zoos and aquariums that meet the highest standards are accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums," AZA President and CEO Jim Maddy said. "The community should take great pride in knowing that Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium is ranked among the best zoos and aquariums in the world."

The accreditation commission praised the zoo's "excellent" animal care, veterinary department, animal enrichment, education, staff morale, maintenance and grounds and dive safety program.

Gary Geddes, director of the Zoological and Environmental Education Division of Metro Parks Tacoma, said the accreditation is a prestigious validation of the zoo's commitment to high standards of animal care, as well as visitor experiences and education.

"I cannot begin to express how proud I am to have our zoo be viewed this positively by my peers," said Geddes. In addition to his position of overall direction for the zoo, he is a member of AZA's Accreditation Commission.

An AZA examination team scrutinized every aspect of the zoo and its operations during a three-day visit in July.

In its report, the Accreditation Commission cited virtually all zoo operations as excellent.

"We passed with flying colors," Deputy Director John Houck said. "It's an excellent report. I'm thrilled for the staff who accomplished this because it's a great reflection of the high-achieving team at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium."

The zoo's animal enrichment program "exceeds current standards," the commission said. In addition, comments from the commission included:

- **Animal care:** "All of the staff had great respect for the veterinary program and its contributions to the overall health of the (animal) collection."
- **Education:** "The accomplishments of this department exceeded what the committee expected. It is "superior to what members have seen at most (zoos), regardless of size."
- **Visitor services:** "Throughout the visit, the inspection team was impressed by the level of interaction between the staff and the public."
- **Staff morale:** "The committee met with a large number of staff members, and the camaraderie between all levels of staff is quite impressive, resulting in an overwhelming sense of pride in their facility."

- **Horticulture:** “The plantings in many of the public areas and in all exhibits are remarkable.”

Commission members also applauded the zoo’s commitment to conservation and research.

In addition, the accreditation inspection team commended the condition of maintenance of all facilities “with the exception of the North Pacific Aquarium.”

Zoo officials are well aware that the 50-year-old North Pacific Aquarium building is nearing the end of its useful life and is showing signs of deterioration and corrosion due to salt water, Houck said.

The zoo’s long-term strategic plan includes recommendations for a modern Pacific Rim aquarium exhibit complex. Details can be found at [www.pdza.org](http://www.pdza.org) under the “Get Involved” tab.

The AZA is a nonprofit professional organization that accredits zoos and aquariums in North America and promotes the conservation, education, science and recreation in zoos & aquariums. Fewer than 10 percent of the approximately 2,400 animal exhibitors licensed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture are accredited by AZA.

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