



## **PACIFIC SEAS AQUARIUM TO OPEN SEPT. 7 AT POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM**

*Sea turtles, hammerhead sharks, eagle rays, and other sea creatures will be ready to greet guests; more animals will move in as finishing touches complete the new state-of-the-art aquarium*

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TACOMA, Wash. – Imagine feeling immersed in ocean waters while hammerhead sharks and eagle rays glide overhead. Majestic sea turtles placidly swim with schools of tropical fish amid colorful coral and a seamount replicating a part of the sea off the coast of Mexico.

This is Baja Bay, the 280,000-gallon showpiece of the new 35,000-square-foot Pacific Seas Aquarium at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium. Zoo leaders announced today that the new aquarium will open Friday, Sept. 7.

“This is a joyful day,” Metro Parks Tacoma Board of Commissioners President Andrea Smith said. “We have set the ‘Come Sea It’ date for the Pacific Seas Aquarium, and very soon, we will throw open the doors to a world of wonder that will ‘wow’ people of every age.”

“We are enormously grateful to the voters of Tacoma who said a resounding ‘Yes’ to the bond issue that made its construction possible.”

The aquarium is funded largely through bonds approved by Tacoma voters in 2014. Additional monies for construction were provided by The Zoo Society through corporate and individual donors, and grants.

Decades in the dreaming and more than four years in planning and construction, the Pacific Seas Aquarium will take zoo guests on an unparalleled journey through our ocean. Its stunning design comes from EHDD, the same architectural firm that imagined the Monterey Bay Aquarium.

But even when it opens, there will be more to come. Finishing touches and a bit of “moving in” work will continue through the end of the year.

“It won’t be 100 percent complete on Sept. 7, but it will be close,” said Alan Varsik, director of Zoological and Environmental Education for Metro Parks Tacoma.

“Aquariums are among the most complex buildings to construct and, like any large project, there will be finishing touches to get just right,” he added. “But we’re so excited about the extraordinary experiences our guests will have inside, we want to invite them in as soon as possible.”

“We’re particularly grateful for The Zoo Society’s fundraising efforts on this project, enabling us to provide added value for our guests,” Varsik said. He pointed out that there are still opportunities for the community to be part of the project through contributions to The [Zoo Society](#).

The new aquarium is the largest capital project in the zoo’s 113-year history. In addition, it’s just one piece of the larger Metro Parks Tacoma [Destination Point Defiance](#) initiative, which is transforming Tacoma’s largest park into an even greater attraction with more engaging spaces for visitors to play, learn and grow.

All of the aquarium exhibits will be open and thousands of sea creatures will be swimming in the Pacific Seas waters on Sept. 7. That means guests will be able to see green sea turtles, sharks, eagle rays and more from the get-go.

Look here and see schooling fish; look there and be mesmerized by jellies floating as if by magic in a one-of-a-kind jelly globe; get up close with a giant Pacific octopus; marvel at hundreds of cold water species swimming in the Northwest Waters exhibit; and touch small animals in the Tidal Touch Zone.

The Baja Bay habitat was designed to accommodate the swimming patterns of the hammerhead sharks, giving guests amazing, nose-to-glass views of them. Guests will crane their necks up to look for the sharks and other fish swimming above them as the wall of water curves overhead. Colorful subtropical fish will swim through Baja Bay, and visitors can enjoy the majesty of the spotted eagle rays seemingly “flying” through the water, or study the expressive faces of sea turtle brothers Sunny and Azul.

Aquarium Curator Neil Allen and the zoo’s team of staff biologists who specialize in aquatic animals will move even more fish and other sea creatures in to the specialized Pacific Seas Aquarium habitats through the end of the year. That means guests who come one week, might come back a few weeks later and make some new finny friends.

The state-of-the-art building replaces the zoo’s 55-year-old North Pacific Aquarium, which connected millions of visitors with the cold-water species native to Puget Sound and the waters off of Washington, Oregon and Alaska. But it was gravely in need of replacement. Portions of the building were corroded and deteriorating after more than five decades of saltwater exposure, and the animal life-support systems were woefully outdated.

The zoo’s South Pacific Aquarium, home to 16 large sharks, the popular Eye-to-Eye Shark Dive program, Stingray Cove and dozens of colorful tropical fish remains open.

The new Pacific Seas Aquarium is about 20 percent larger than its predecessor. It’s also constructed with 21<sup>st</sup> century technology, making it as energy-efficient as they come. The aquarium will employ numerous

power- and water-saving techniques to shrink the building's use of resources. Much of that technology won't be visible to guests, but it will show up in reduced resource consumption and energy-bill savings for the zoo. One thing visitors will know about: When they flush the toilets, they'll be doing so with rainwater collected on site.

"We want a visit to the Pacific Seas Aquarium to be an exciting, immersive experience," said Conservation Engagement Manager Karen Povey. "We think our guests will feel as if they're *in* the ocean while watching green sea turtle brothers Sunny and Azul swim by, marveling at hammerhead sharks, or staring with wonder at the beauty of the sea."

"We are confident that generations of guests will be inspired to take action to improve the health of the ocean – and the lives of the creatures that live there," said Smith.

A community celebration of the Pacific Seas Aquarium will be held next spring.

For more information, go to [www.pdza.org/pacificseasaquarium](http://www.pdza.org/pacificseasaquarium).

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*Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest's only combined zoo and aquarium, practices and promotes responsible stewardship of the world's resources. A member of the Metro Parks Tacoma family, the zoo creates a legacy of sustainability for future generations through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities; it also embodies Metro Parks' mission of creating healthy opportunities to play, learn and grow. The zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA). The Zoo Society, a 501(c)(3) organization, is an instrumental partner in the conservation, animal-welfare and education initiatives.*

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