



## **RESTORING THE SOUTH PACIFIC AQUARIUM**

*Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium will begin a restoration-and-repair of its aging South Pacific Aquarium Nov. 15*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** Oct. 13, 2021

TACOMA, Wash. – After 32 hardworking years, the popular South Pacific Aquarium at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium needs some love. On November 15, the aquarium will close for restoration and repair of critical animal-care structures, habitats and life support systems, to reopen in 2023 with exciting new species, upgraded systems and immersive South Pacific-themed art.

“This is unglamorous but crucial work to support our many South Pacific Aquarium animals and preserve this historic aquarium for another two decades,” said Alan Varsik, director of Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium. “We’re excited to roll up our sleeves and get to work, and we look forward to welcoming guests back to an improved experience.”

### **DETAILS AND PLAN**

The restoration is expected to last over a year, with an estimated cost of \$4.8 million, although that may change slightly as the project moves through the design stages. The project will be funded through bonds approved by Tacoma voters in 2014 and the zoo’s operating budget.

The new Pacific Seas Aquarium, built in 2018, will remain open during that time, with multiple ocean species on view from green sea turtles, hammerhead sharks and spotted eagle rays to touchable low-tide animals.

Many of the critical repairs to the aging aquarium will not be visible to the public. Others will be dramatically beautiful.

### **WHAT WILL BE VISIBLE**

- Exciting new South Pacific animal species
- Brand-new coral reef rockwork in the Outer Reef and Blue Hole habitats
- Resealing, cleaning and polishing of viewing windows
- More natural light from new ceiling windows at the aquarium entrance
- Immersive, South-Pacific-themed artwork
- Improvements to the Eye-to-Eye Shark Dive experience, including a new human-shark barrier that is better for both sharks and humans

## WHAT WON'T BE VISIBLE

- Critical roof repairs
- Repair of concrete cracks and spalling
- Repair of walkways and gates used by aquarists to feed and care for sharks
- New heat pump, ventilator, industrial dehumidifier and electrical updates
- Improvements to critical life support systems for all animals

To achieve these crucial repairs and upgrades, the 300,000 gallons of warm saltwater must be drained from the aquarium's four habitats (Outer Reef, Blue Hole, Lagoon and Stingray Cove). During that time, most of the 700 fish and invertebrates will be transported to temporary homes in the zoo's behind-the-scenes Aquatic Animal Care Center where staff will continue to care for them. Some animals will move permanently to new homes at other zoos.

Eye-to-Eye Shark Dives – a program that has connected people with sharks and their conservation for over eight years – will be paused during construction, and will resume after re-opening. Stingray touching will also resume.

## HISTORY

The 25,000-square-foot aquarium South Pacific Aquarium opened in 1989, built with a voter-approved 1986 Metro Parks Tacoma bond issue and designed to transport visitors to a tropical island in the South Pacific. Stingray Cove was added in 2013.

“The South Pacific Aquarium is a beloved gem in our community, with many special ocean animals,” said Varsik. “We are proud to be its stewards, and proud to be conserving it for the next generation of ocean-lovers.”

###

*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). [The Zoo Society](#), a 501(c)(3) organization, is an instrumental partner in the conservation, animal-welfare and education initiatives.*

## Media Contacts

Whitney DalBalcon: 253-278-6343 or [whitney.dalbalcon@pdza.org](mailto:whitney.dalbalcon@pdza.org)

Tessa Miller: 253-686-6927 or [tessa.miller@pdza.org](mailto:tessa.miller@pdza.org)