New Keeper Adventure Tours will take you on a ‘wild’ ride

You can soon see Northwest Trek in an entirely new way.

Keeper Adventure Tours are scheduled to begin next month, taking small groups of guests on an enthralling journey through the Free-Roaming Area aboard a specially outfitted Jeep designed with comfort and maximum animal viewing in mind.

This brand-new premium experience takes the roads less traveled—the tracks through Northwest Trek where tram tours don’t go.

“We want to provide our members and other visitors with a more intimate, personal animal-viewing experience,” said Northwest Trek Deputy Director Rick Dietz. “These trips will help connect people more closely with the broad and interesting range of native species for which we care.”

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CANADA LYNX NUKA SETTLES IN to wows from visitors—and has an important role in the future of her species

Under tall trees, Nuka pads silently. Her enormous yellow eyes keep a watchful gaze on the humans admiring her tufty ears and thick fur. The often playful Canada lynx joined the Northwest Trek animal family late last year, and she has charmed visitors since her public debut in February.

“She’s so spunky,” said keeper Haley Withers, who helps care for Nuka. “She loves birds—stalking them, chasing them.”

Nuka also “loves to bat things around like any cat,” said keeper Angela Gibson.

That behavior makes her enormously fun to view in her wooded habitat.

But Nuka’s presence at Northwest Trek is far larger than the footprints of just one lynx.

The hope is that romance will bloom in Cat Country, and she will mate with longtime resident male Omak. They are part of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums’ Species Survival Plan® (SSP) managed breeding program for Canada lynx.

“Participating in the program allows us to have a role in maintaining the species as a whole,” said Zoological Curator Marc Heinzman. Continued on page 2
Keeper Adventure Tours
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Each tour is led by an experienced keeper who knows where to find bison, elk, moose, deer and other animals in the vast Free-Roaming Area and give participants an incredible view of the action.

Watch bighorn sheep scampering up and down steep hillsides. Drive so close you can hear moose munching on browse. Fill your camera lens with the sight of a behemoth bison.

The 90-minute tours will run at 10:30 a.m. and 1 p.m. on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. They are expected to launch in mid-to-late June. Watch our website at nwtrek.org for updates.

Tickets must be purchased at the front gate on the day of the tour and will be sold on a first-come, first-served basis. Each trip is limited to eight passengers ages 5 and up.

Keeper Adventure Tour tickets are $80 per member; $90 per non-member.

All you need to bring is your love of animals and—of course—a taste for adventure.

Seasons have changed in the meadows and forests of Northwest Trek, and new life will not be far behind. The rutting behavior that occurred for dominance among the bison herd last fall culminated in mating between males and females.

“We expect to see calves soon.” Head Keeper Ed Cleveland said. “This is a great time of year to come and visit, take the tram tour through the Free-Roaming Area and keep an eye out for protective mamas hovering over newborns.”

Keepers’ experience with the herds and wise eyes tell them there are pregnancies, but perhaps not all are obvious just yet. Once the newborns do arrive, everyone will be delighted.

“Seeing the smiles on the faces of our guests and knowing that they are learning more about native Northwest wildlife makes our jobs all the more gratifying,” Cleveland said.

Canada Lynx
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“Seeing breeding behavior and perhaps the birth and raising of kittens could provide a better opportunity for us to tell the story of the species to our guests.”

Of course, it’s early days yet; it takes time for a newcomer like Nuka to get accustomed to new surroundings before gaining a potential mate.

The Canada lynx is an endangered species in Washington, under serious threat from loss of habitat and disturbance from roadbuilding and other human activities in their wilderness homes. Nuka and Omak—and their potential offspring—will help us mobilize citizen and government action to protect them from extinction in our state.

None of which occurs to Nuka, calmly licking her paw in the shade. But to the humans gazing at her—and helping Northwest Trek save wildlife—it’s an incredibly important thing.
Deep in the forests of Mount Rainier National Park, a female fisher holes up in the crook of a towering Douglas fir, protecting and feeding her newborn kits.

Far below and several miles away, a propeller spins faster and faster, generating the speed needed to hurl a small aircraft down an airstrip and into the Northwest skies. The plane’s belly and wings bristle with antennae as it heads off on a mission to pinpoint her location using signals from a transmitter implanted before her release.

The monitoring we’re doing is a key component to help determine if the Fisher Recovery Project is successful.

Northwest Trek is partnering with the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, the National Park Service and Conservation Northwest in the effort to restore fishers to one of their natural ranges. The members of the weasel family went extinct in the area a century ago, falling victim to fur trappers and deforestation.

Fishers were transplanted to Mount Rainier National Park and the Gifford Pinchot National Forest from British Columbia in 2015 and 2016. The animals play an important role in maintaining forest health and biodiversity, in part by controlling populations of porcupines and other rodents.

“The data gathered from aircraft monitoring and ground surveillance helps us learn whether the fishers are thriving and breeding, and where and how far they’re moving,” Mueller said. The work can be pretty intense, but Mueller says she enjoys every minute.

“It’s rewarding to play a role in bringing the fisher back from extinction to its rightful home in the forests of Washington,” she said. “And it’s the kind of conservation work that is central to the mission of Northwest Trek.”

Northwest Trek Wildlife Park members and visitors and the Northwest Trek Foundation made last summer to aid the small, swift predators in the Cascade Range.

“This is exciting,” said Northwest Trek Conservation Program Coordinator Rachael Mueller, who will spend hours in the tiny aircraft, listening for the beeps that indicate a fisher’s location.

“The monitoring we’re doing is a key component to help determine if the Fisher Recovery Project is successful.”

Once the fisher’s location is locked into global positioning systems, scientists on the ground hike into the forest, searching for the den. If they find it, they affix cameras to trees in the area, hoping to capture photographs of the budding fisher family’s activity.

Northwest Trek visitors and staff play a crucial role in the reintroduction of the fisher to the Cascades.

Eagle Passage exhibit coming to Northwest Trek—and you can help make it a reality

Stop. Take a breath. Listen. Do you hear that? The high-pitched whistling of bald eagles in the trees alerts you to the presence of these majestic—and once highly endangered—animals.

Eagle Passage, a world-class habitat showcasing several bald eagles, is scheduled to open in the spring of 2019 at Northwest Trek.

These eagles, unable to survive in the wild, will be cared for at the wildlife park as regal ambassadors for their species. Existing trees and vegetation surrounded by a 30-foot mesh will form their new forest home.

Eagle Passage will tell the conservation story of the recovery of this proud species from near extinction to robust wild populations.

The Northwest Trek Foundation is raising funds for the exhibit. Donations may be made at the Northwest Trek entrance windows or by contacting Tyra Larson at tyra.larson@nwtrek.org or 360-832-7165. For more information, go to nwtrek.org/eaglepassage
General Information
360-832-6117 | nwtrek.org

Spring/Summer hours
Through June 29
Mondays-Fridays: 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Saturdays-Sundays: 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.
June 30-Sept. 3
Daily: 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Special Openings
July 4; Labor Day, Sept. 3

JEANNIE MARSH, Membership Coordinator
360-832-7170 | Jeannie.Marsh@nwtrek.org

Northwest Trek, accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums, is a 725-acre zoological park devoted to the display, interpretation, research and conservation of North American native wildlife.

Thank You to our Community Partners

Slime sublime
Slide on over to celebrate 35 Years of Slug Fest on June 23 and 24

Maybe it’s the slime. Or maybe it’s the speed. Slug Fest has been reigning supreme at Northwest Trek for more than three decades, and returns June 23-24 for its 35th anniversary.

“It’s such a success because there’s nothing around here like it,” said Education Curator Jessica Moore. “People come out of curiosity—what is a banana slug, and why should we celebrate it?”

Slug Fest participants seek the marvelous mollusks in their leaf-mold habitat to learn how they break down organic matter, helping new plants grow.

Then there are the Human Slug Races, in which visitors imitate the invertebrates, sliding down a soapy track as if giant slugs moving along on a trail of slime.

Make your own tentacles? Play on a giant wooden slug? Yep, you can do those, too.

“We have people who come back to defend their title as Slug Race champion,” Moore said. “But we also have our diehard slug fans who come year after year because they truly love these amazing creatures.”

New Wild Rewards program coming soon
Northwest Trek membership has its privileges—and they are about to get even better. Look for our new Wild Rewards program coming soon.