



Northwest Trek
Wildlife Park

METRO PARKS TACOMA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Jan. 2, 2017

NORTHWEST TREK WILDLIFE PARK SETS ATTENDANCE RECORD WITH MORE THAN A QUARTER MILLION VISITORS IN 2016

Opening of Kids' Trek play area plus births of moose, bison, elk calves and beaver kits draw huge crowds

EATONVILLE, Wash. – Northwest Trek Wildlife Park built it – and they came. By the carload. By the busload. In droves.

The opening of the half-acre, \$1.9 million Kids' Trek play area helped boost the wildlife park's 2016 attendance past the quarter-million visitor mark, easily eclipsing the record set last year.



calves; big horn sheep lambs, deer fawns; and three beaver

The Norling family, which recently moved to the Puget Sound area from Boise, walked through the Northwest Trek Wildlife Park gates shortly after noon on Friday, Dec. 30. The family set the quarter-million mark for 2016, as one of the group was the 250,000th visitor for the year. From left to right: Melissa Norling, Kara Bryant, Payton Norling, Renee Norling, Bailey Norling, Cynthia Correll, and Jackson Bryant (in stroller).

By the time the ticket booths closed on New Year's Eve, the wildlife park near Eatonville had recorded 250,893 visitors for the year. That's a whopping 36,197 more than the all-time-high mark of 214,696 set in 2015.

Though the opening of the nature-inspired playground in April certainly helped draw the crowds, visitors also came in large numbers to see the native Northwest animals for which the park is known.

Some two-dozen animals, including bison, elk and moose



another five-year accreditation from the Association of Zoos & Aquariums in September.

"We are thrilled with the many successes of Northwest Trek in 2016," said Metro Parks Tacoma Board of Commissioners President Erik Hanberg. "In particular, the popularity of Kids' Trek was a validation of voters' confidence in Northwest Trek's ability to provide a fun experience while at the same time instilling an appreciation for nature."

Kids' Trek was paid for in part with voter-approved bond funds. Donations from the Northwest Trek Foundation, grants, area businesses, corporations and individuals funded about three-quarters of the cost.

In addition to the ability to view native Northwest wildlife in natural settings, kids from toddlers to tweens now have an opportunity to appreciate the outdoors in a new way. The play area features a giant replica tree stump for kids to climb into and out of; a pole for kids to slide down; three slides, including one that winds through a tunnel; nets to climb and play on; a toddler play area with sand and a weeping rock; a meandering stream; and a building area with logs.

And everywhere kids look, there are touches of nature for exploration and learning, including animal and leaf imprints in the concrete walkways, huge tree rings and root wads, and a replica beaver complete with its dam.

kits were born in the Free-Roaming and Wetlands areas during the spring and summer.

It also was a rewarding year for Northwest Trek as a respected conservation leader with high standards of animal care and a record of engaging the community in environmental awareness.

Following a rigorous inspection, the wildlife park earned





The April 2 grand opening of Kids' Trek set the tone for a milestone year filled with the joys of nature and discovery of the outdoors at the 41-year-old wildlife park. Highlights included:



- **Births of several animals around the wildlife park.** A set of beaver kit triplets was born in the Wetlands Area in the spring. Bison, elk and caribou calves, deer fawns, bighorn sheep lambs, trumpeter swan cygnets and a moose calf all arrived during the spring and summer in the Free-Roaming Area.
- **The birth of Spruce the moose** calf, in particular, put a spotlight on the ongoing story of Northwest Trek's conservation of this species. The wildlife park took in three young moose orphans in the summer and fall of 2012. Two of them, Ellis and Connie, have produced two calves, adding to the numbers of this large and engaging land mammal in Northwest Trek's 435-acre Free-Roaming Area. Spruce's birth was followed shortly by the "adoption" of another abandoned moose calf, Aspen. There are now six moose at the wildlife park.
- **The American bison was named the National Mammal.** Northwest Trek is home to a herd of bison. The iconic animal of the American West was named the National Mammal by President Barack Obama last spring. Although bison once roamed the plains by the hundreds of thousands, their numbers are dwindling. A half-dozen bison calves were born at Northwest Trek last year.
- **Leading the way in conservation.** Northwest Trek provided opportunities throughout the year for people to participate in Citizen Science opportunities like Nature Mapping. The wildlife park also participated in an effort to reintroduce grizzly bears to the North Cascades. And members of the Northwest Trek staff took part in the release of wild fishers into mountains.
- **Prestigious recognition from the Association of Zoos & Aquariums.** Northwest Trek was awarded a new, five-year accreditation in September from the peer organization following a rigorous inspection that took place during the spring. The accreditation – achieved by only about 10 percent of all zoos in the United States – signifies that the wildlife park meets the highest standards of animal care and fiscal responsibility. Northwest Trek has been continuously accredited since 1985.

More than 7 million visitors have walked through the turnstiles since the wildlife park opened on July 17, 1975. It is not only a unique treasure to the Northwest; it is one of only a handful of large-landscape wildlife parks in the nation.

Every visit to Northwest Trek includes a 50-minute narrated tour of the Free-Roaming Area aboard a heated tram. The forest-and-meadow-studded area is home to herds of American bison and Roosevelt elk, plus bighorn sheep, mountain goats, deer and moose.

Guests may also walk paved pathways through the forest to view native Northwest wildlife such as wolves, foxes, bobcats, Canada lynx, coyotes, beavers, fishers, river otters, porcupines, raccoons, owls and other animals in natural exhibits.

Northwest Trek is open Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays during the winter. Ticket-window hours are from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., but the grounds remain open to visitors until 4:30 p.m.

The wildlife park will have a special Monday opening on Jan. 16, the observance of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday.

"We are gratified that so many people see the value of connecting with nature through the many touchpoints we offer at Northwest Trek – from viewing animals in the Free-Roaming Area or in their exhibits to touching animal artifacts like pelts and antlers to get a closer feel for the world around them," said Alan Varsik, director of Zoological and Environmental Education for Metro Parks Tacoma.

"The work we do to introduce generations more closely to nature is crucial. We will continue our record of extraordinary customer service for our visitors and conservation of wildlife in 2017."

For more information, go to www.nwtrek.org.

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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.

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