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NORTHWEST TREK WILDLIFE PARK SETS ALL-TIME ATTENDANCE RECORD AS THE 214,196TH VISITOR OF 2015 WALKS THROUGH THE TURNSTILES AT 11:45 A.M. ON NEW YEAR'S EVE DAY
He also was the wildlife park's 6,677,763rd visitor in its 40-year history, a fitting capstone to a year-long celebration marking four decades of showcasing native Northwest wildlife

EATONVILLE, Wash. – When the Weed family of Bremerton walked through the turnstiles at Northwest Trek Wildlife Park this morning, they made history. Together, they were the 214,196th, 214,197th, 214,198th, 214,199th and 214,200th visitors at the wildlife park in 2015.



That set an all-time attendance record, eclipsing the previous high mark of 214,195, set 22 years ago. Fittingly, the record caps a year-long celebration of Northwest Trek's 40th anniversary.

By the time the wildlife park closed at 3 p.m., 984 people had walked through the gates today, bringing the year's total visitor number to a whopping 214,696.

The Weed Family: James, Kelly, Maya, 7, Juliet, 5, and Elizabeth, 4, helped Northwest Trek Wildlife Park set a new attendance record this morning.

To celebrate this milestone – and continue thanking visitors for their 40-year support of the wildlife park – a special Kids Free promotion will be extended through Jan. 3. Up to four children 12 and younger will be admitted free with each paying adult Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

The promotion was to have ended today.

Northwest Trek mascot Footloose the moose greeted the family. James, who serves in the U.S. Navy, was officially the 214,196th visitor of the year. He was accompanied by wife Kelly and daughters Maya, 7, Juliet, 5, and Elizabeth, 4.



“We are thrilled that we achieved this milestone during what has been a very special year for us,” said Dan Belting, Northwest Trek’s facilities manager, who presented the family with a one-year membership to the wildlife park in honor of their record-setting visit. “We are gratified that our care and concern for wildlife and

messages about nature reach so many people from across the Puget Sound region and around the nation.”

More than 6.6 million people have visited Northwest Trek since the wildlife park opened on July 17, 1975 to showcase native wildlife in natural settings and help people learn more about nature.

And everyone who took Northwest Trek’s signature tram tour and walked its forested pathways past natural animal exhibits was part of something special in 2015.

Over the course of the year, the wildlife park:

- Cheered the births of more than a dozen young animals, from American bison, Roosevelt elk and caribou calves to bighorn sheep lambs, deer fawns and one very special moose calf. Willow, now nearly 6 months old, was born on July 17 – the wildlife park’s 40th anniversary – to mother Connie, who is named in honor of Northwest Trek co-founder Connie Hellyer. Willow’s father, Ellis, is named for longtime Northwest Trek Deputy Director Dave Ellis, who died in 2012.
- Celebrated Northwest Trek’s 40th birthday with a three-day bash in July that included fun, games and birthday cupcakes for visitors.
- Partnered with the Northwest Trek Foundation on a Champions Challenge that raised some \$61,000 in support of the new Kids’ Trek play area.
- Began construction on the half-acre, \$1.9 million Kids’ Trek nature-themed play area, which is nearing completion and due to open in spring 2016. The playground is designed to let children get some exercise for bodies and minds while learning more about nature, animals and the world around them in a fun and engaging way. It is being funded by a 2014 Metro Parks Tacoma voter-approved bond issue, in addition to grants from the Northwest Trek Foundation, corporate donors and generous individuals.

- Released 254 endangered Oregon spotted frogs into a Pierce County wetlands area after giving the little amphibians a head start in life with careful rearing by Northwest Trek staff. This marked the seventh year of a multi-agency program to reintroduce the native amphibians to the wild in numbers that will hopefully help the species to thrive. Over the years, more than 7,300 Oregon spotted frogs have been reared from eggs into tadpoles and juvenile amphibians before their release into area wetlands. Some 1,600 of those got their start at Northwest Trek. The so called “head-starting” of the frogs in a controlled environment allows them to grow away from predators and environmental perils.
- Conducted a Help Out for Half Off food drive that brought in more than a ton and a half of donated food for the Emergency Food Network during November. Visitors received half off general admission in exchange for bringing two or more shelf-stable food items to help out hungry families during the holiday season. And they were generous beyond expectations, with many families coming to visit Northwest Trek with grocery bags and boxes full of canned goods, cereals, peanut butter and other yummy items. The Emergency Food Network, which serves Pierce County, said the 3,504 pounds of donated food would provide 2,804 meals to people in need. That’s enough for three meals a day to eight families of four for a month.



A group of kids gets a special sneak peek at the beaver lodge and its resident inhabitant at the still-under-construction Kids’ Trek nature-themed play area, due to open next spring. The lodge is one of many interactive play areas in the half-acre Kids’ Trek.

Every visit to Northwest Trek includes a 50-minute, narrated tour of the 435-acre 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 three adult moose. And, of course, the aforementioned adorable moose calf.

Guests also may 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 from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. daily through Jan. 3.

Beginning next week, the wildlife park returns to its normal winter schedule with open hours Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

“We have a lot to look forward to in 2016,” said Northwest Trek Deputy Director Alan Varsik. “We’re certain that Kids’ Trek will set a high standard for the way in which children interact with nature during play and exercise time. And since playtime in Kids’ Trek will be included with every admission to Northwest Trek, we expect it to be a very popular attraction.”

For more information about Northwest Trek, 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.