



**Northwest Trek**  
Wildlife Park

**METRO PARKS TACOMA**

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## ***GERIATRIC GRIZZLY BEAR HUMANELY EUTHANIZED AT NORTHWEST TREK WILDLIFE PARK***

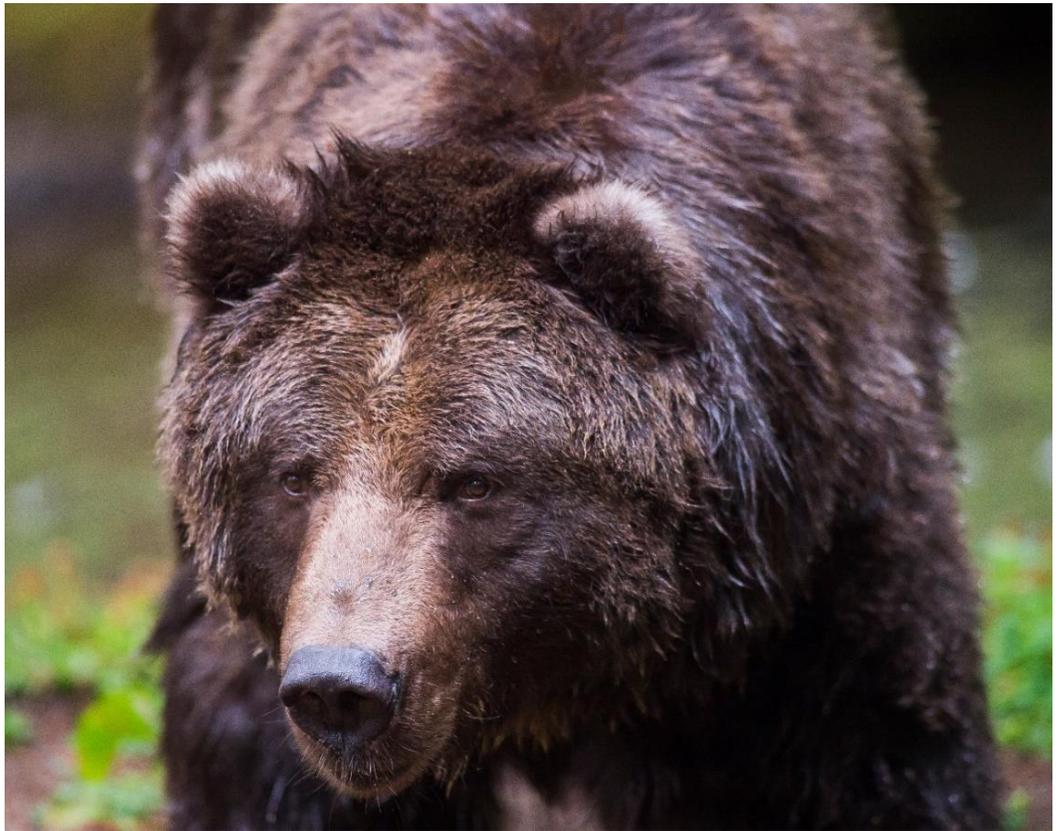
*Denali led a long life as an ambassador for her species, inspiring millions to care about bears*

EATONVILLE, Wash. — Denali, a 26-year-old grizzly bear who inspired millions to learn about her species and care for her wild counterparts, was humanely euthanized at Northwest Trek Wildlife Park on Monday.

“The entire Northwest Trek staff is saddened by the loss of Denali,” Zoological Curator Marc Heinzman said.

“She taught us all about the majesty and power of grizzly bears. Visitors made it a point to stop by her habitat to watch her scratch her back on a tree, cool off in her pool or simply lumber through the woods in search of food enrichments that keepers put out for her.”

The geriatric bear developed arthritis that affected several joints in her body, making it progressively more difficult for her to get around and compromising her quality of life, Northwest Trek veterinarian Dr. Allison Case said.



She and other Northwest Trek staff worked for more than two years to slow the progression of the disease, employing an array of medicines, techniques and specialists to increase Denali’s mobility and comfort. Case treated Denali with anti-inflammatory, pain, and joint medications and arranged for her to have chiropractic, acupuncture and herbal medicine treatments, as well as electromagnetic muscle stimulation. When the bear’s condition began to further deteriorate, staff made the difficult decision to euthanize her, Case said.

Keeper Angela Gibson built an elevated bed for the bear, and a bridge was constructed to make it easier to cross the stream in her habitat.

Denali was the eighth-oldest grizzly at any accredited zoo in the United States and the only one of her species at Northwest Trek. The median life expectancy for a female grizzly bear in human care is about 26 years, according to statistics from the

Association of Zoos & Aquariums.

She arrived at Northwest Trek in 1993 as a 2-year-old and was one of the first bears to live in the wildlife park's then brand-new forested bear habitat. In the years since her arrival, more than 4.4 million people have visited Northwest Trek, and the popular bear exhibit is a first stop for many guests.

For many years, the grizzly also was a star of Northwest Trek's annual Bear Camp event, helping to teach visitors about ways bears and humans can safely coexist in the wild during camping season.

"Sometimes we are fortunate to have extraordinary animals change our lives," Gibson said.

Gibson, who has been the bear keeper at Northwest Trek for the last eight years, once watched Denali move rocks around her habitat so the bear could build her own "ladder" to grab food that was higher up in a tree than she could reach. Denali also loved to play and splash in her pool, turning her snout and face to the sun.

Northwest Trek long has been a strong voice on behalf of grizzly bears, and their conservation is one of the wildlife park's signature outreach initiatives. Heinzman participates on the steering committee of Friends of the North Cascades Grizzly Bear, of which Northwest Trek is a member.

Wildlife officials estimate that today fewer than 10 grizzlies remain in an area of the North Cascades that spans nearly 10,000 square miles.

On Monday night, the Metro Parks Tacoma Board of Commissioners approved a resolution in support of restoring a healthy grizzly bear population to that area of their native range.

The board resolution endorsed Alternative C, one of four options the National Park Service and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service are considering for an environmental impact statement on the future of the bears. Under Alternative C, wildlife scientists would slowly release grizzly bears into remote areas of North Cascades National Park and other nearby public lands over five to 10 years, with an initial goal of 25 bears.

The federal agencies are taking public comment on the draft environmental impact statement through March 14. Additional information is available at [www.nwtrek.org/grizzlybears](http://www.nwtrek.org/grizzlybears).

The endorsement by Metro Parks Tacoma dovetails with both the mission of the park district and the wildlife park it owns and operates.

"Grizzly bears are crucial to maintaining plant and animal diversity in Cascade forests," Heinzman said. "We are pleased that we can help educate our community about the many very good reasons for gradually re-introducing them to remote areas of our region.

"And we are enormously grateful for the role Denali played for nearly a quarter century of inspiring our community to appreciate grizzly bears and advocate for their protection in the wild."

Once upgrades are made to the grizzly bear habitat, the wildlife park plans to offer a home to orphaned cubs or perhaps a homeless brown bear that can't be relocated into the wild, Heinzman said. Two 8-year-old black bears live in the forested habitat next to the grizzly bear exhibit space.

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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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