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## **NEW DEPUTY DIRECTOR BRINGS PASSION FOR ANIMALS AND CONSERVATION, LONG HISTORY OF WORK IN THE ZOOLOGICAL FIELD TO NORTHWEST TREK WILDLIFE PARK**

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EATONVILLE, Wash. – Alan Varsik, a learn-from-the-ground-up administrator who has cared for animals and tended to a zillion details involved in running a big zoo, is the new Deputy Director at Northwest Trek Wildlife Park.



**Alan Varsik, Northwest Trek Wildlife Park**

Varsik began his new duties last week.

He leads the on-site staff responsible for the day-to-day operations of the 725-acre wildlife park near Eatonville.

“Alan brings deep zoological experience and passion for wildlife to Northwest Trek,” said Gary Geddes, director of the Zoological and Environmental Education Division of Metro Parks Tacoma. “His commitment and knowledge will be huge assets as we continue to move the wildlife park forward.”

Varsik says he knew as an environmental biology major in college that he wanted a career fusing his passion for animals with his commitment to conservation.

It wasn't long before he was working at a children's zoo in Oakland, Calif.

From those beginnings, he moved on to working with primates at Brookfield Zoo near Chicago; served as curator at Lincoln Park Zoo; worked as zoological manager in the Tree of Life area at Disney's Animal Kingdom when that park opened; was general curator and assistant director at Santa Barbara Zoo; and most recently served as deputy director and chief operating officer at Oklahoma City Zoo. He's also done conservation work with the California condor and Channel Island Fox.

Now, he's putting the experience he acquired in those jobs together with his passion for wildlife and conservation at Northwest Trek, a unique facility in Washington state. The wildlife park, accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums, features a 435-acre Free-Roaming Area that is home to herds of American bison, Roosevelt elk and

woodland caribou. Moose, deer and other animals also wander the meadows, wetlands. Visitors can view these animals while riding aboard trams driven by naturalists who provide facts and information along the way.

“Northwest Trek is unique because of the immersive experience visitors have in the Free-Roaming Area,” Varsik said “It’s ever-changing. You’re going to see animals in a different way every time you go.”

He’s also come at a milestone time in the wildlife park’s history. Northwest Trek turns 40 on July 17.

In addition to the animals viewable in the Free-Roaming Area, Northwest Trek features black bears, a grizzly bear, wolves, foxes, coyotes, bobcats, Canada lynx, river otters, fishers, owls and a large variety of other animals in natural exhibits along forested pathways.

And in its four decades, the wildlife park has built an impressive legacy of education about Northwest native wildlife and conservation efforts to preserve it.

Northwest Trek twice won the AZA’s prestigious North American Conservation Award in recent years.

Varsik is excited to be part of that tradition.

“There are a lot of conservation stories to tell with different species,” he said. “I’m really excited to be here.”

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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, a facility of Metro Parks Tacoma, is celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2015. It’s located 35 miles southeast of Tacoma off State Highway 161.*