



Northwest Trek
Wildlife Park

METRO PARKS TACOMA

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LONGTIME ZOO LEADER WITH DEEP ROOTS IN SPECIES CONSERVATION NAMED DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF NORTHWEST TREK WILDLIFE PARK

Rick Dietz will begin his new position in June, coming in from The Wilds in Ohio

EATONVILLE, Wash. – Rick Dietz is passionate about wildlife conservation and believes deeply in helping people interact with nature and animals in ways that connect them more closely with the natural world.



That made him a “natural fit” and an excellent choice to lead Northwest Trek Wildlife Park as its Deputy Director, according to Alan Varsik.

Varsik, director of Zoological and Environmental Education for Metro Parks Tacoma, announced Dietz’s appointment this week.

“Rick Dietz will bring extensive zoo leadership and management experience, coupled with a lifelong passion for wildlife to Northwest Trek,” Varsik said. “We are excited to have him join our team and to continue our decades-long tradition of helping our visitors learn about native Northwest species.”

Dietz will begin his new job at the Eatonville-area wildlife park in June. He currently is Vice President of The Wilds/Columbus Zoo & Aquarium, a 10,000 –acre wildlife conservation center in Cumberland, Ohio.

“I’ve always had a passion for conserving native species and habitats, and Northwest Trek is a leader in this field,” Dietz said. “I’m excited to be a part of this great team and look forward to advancing and expanding Northwest Trek’s conservation and education programming while continuing to provide an exceptional guest experience.”

That philosophy dovetails exactly with Northwest Trek’s conservation mission, Varsik said. Dietz

will be instrumental in helping Northwest Trek staff do the crucial storytelling that engages visitors and enlists them in efforts to save endangered and threatened species.

At The Wilds, Dietz directs an Association of Zoos & Aquariums' (AZA) accredited zoological facility that focuses on the reproduction of endangered species, restoration ecology, wildlife ecology, conservation education and conservation medicine. In addition, The Wilds provides guests with an extensive menu of experiences, including overnight accommodations, horseback safaris, fishing tours, zip line adventures, summer camps and wildlife safari tours.

Dietz presided over four consecutive years of record attendance and recently secured the largest single donation in the wildlife park's history.

Before he joined The Wilds five years ago, Dietz held a number of progressively responsible positions at Audubon Zoo and the Audubon Nature Institute in New Orleans. He began his career at Audubon Zoo in 1996 as a zookeeper in the Louisiana Swamp Exhibit and then worked as senior zookeeper of amphibians and reptiles; assistant curator of the Louisiana Swamp/Jaguar Jungle; curator of animal collections; and then vice president/general curator of the Audubon Zoo/Audubon Nature Institute.

Dietz is a professional AZA fellow and has served as an inspector of other zoos seeking AZA accreditation since 2007. AZA accredited zoos must meet rigorous standards of fiscal health and responsibility, animal husbandry and veterinary care as well as providing top-notch guest experiences.

Dietz also is a board member of the Conservation Centers for Species Survival and the Cambridge Area Chamber of Commerce board of directors. He earned a bachelor's degree in biology from Loyola University. And he was honored with the Audubon Nature Institute President's Award in 2002.

He succeeds Varsik in the crucial leadership role as deputy director at Northwest Trek, overseeing all operations at the wildlife park. Varsik was promoted to director of Zoological and Environmental Education for Metro Parks Tacoma at the end of 2016. Donna Powell, business and administrative services manager, has been serving as the interim director while a search was conducted to fill the vacancy.

Northwest Trek received a new five-year accreditation from AZA last September. The wildlife park has been continuously accredited by AZA since 1985. More than 250,000 people visited Northwest Trek last year, flocking to see native Northwest animals in natural exhibits.

Northwest Trek is open from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays through Fridays and 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays. Guests may stay in the wildlife park until 90 minutes after the last tickets are sold.

For more information on hours and things to see and do at the wildlife park, 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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