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NORTHWEST TREK WILDLIFE PARK CELEBRATES 40TH BIRTHDAY WITH THREE DAYS OF TREATS, FUN AND GAMES FOR VISITORS

Northwest Trek's 40th Birthday

What: A three-day celebration to mark the 40th birthday of Northwest Trek Wildlife Park.

When: Friday, July 17- Sunday, July 19. 9:30 a.m.-6 p.m. each day.

Where: Northwest Trek Wildlife Park, 11610 Trek Drive E., Eatonville.

Activities each day:

11:30 a.m. Wetlands animals receive special birthday cakes.

1 p.m. Watch bears devour birthday treats artfully prepared by keepers with some of their "beary" favorite foods.

2 p.m. Cat Country animals will snack on specially prepared birthday "cakes" so delicious they might make a cougar purr.

2 p.m. Photo ops with Northwest Trek's mascot, Footloose Moose.

All day: Birthday games, crafts and other activities for visitors.

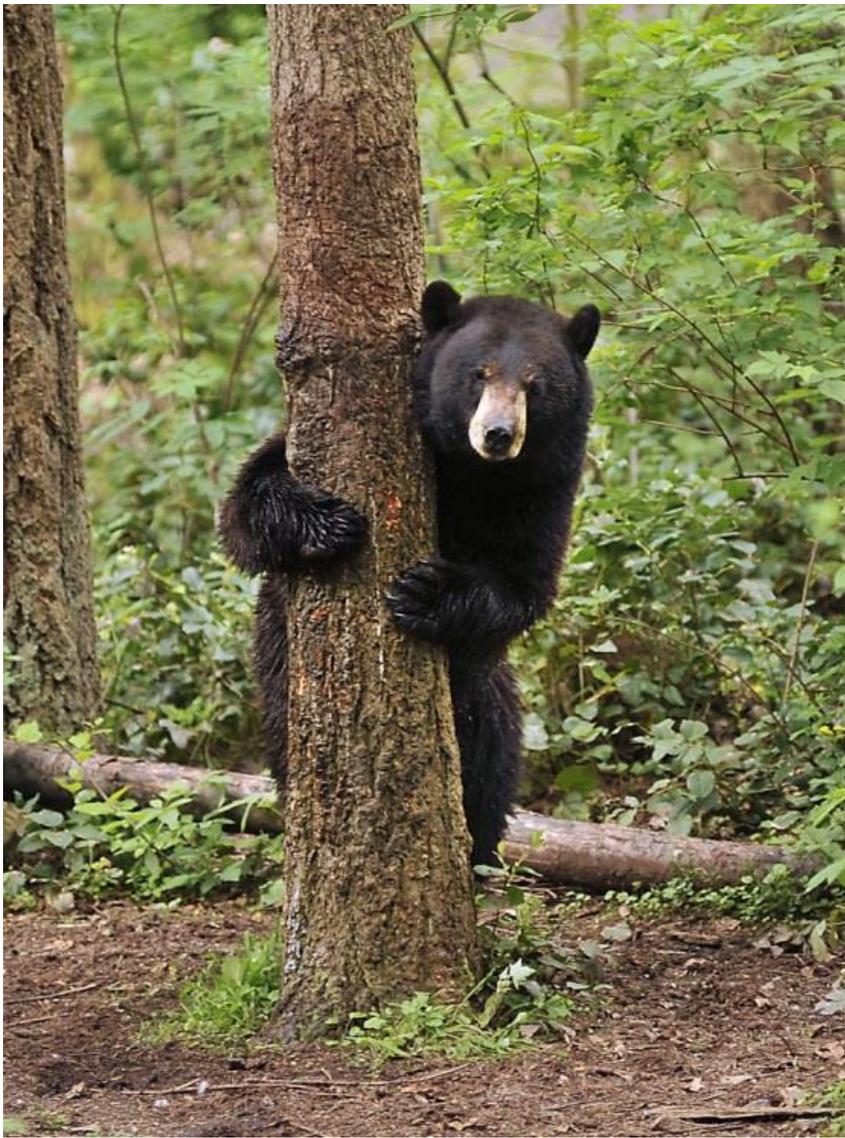
EATONVILLE, Wash. – It's a party so big, it takes three days.

Northwest Trek Wildlife Park is celebrating its 40th birthday this weekend with three fun-filled days of creative treats for animals, special games for people to play, visits from Footloose the Moose and free mini-cupcakes for visitors.



The now-725-acre wildlife park opened on July 17, 1975. More than 6.5 million people have walked through the gates in the intervening years, getting rich views of native Northwest animals in natural settings.

Many people describe the wildlife park – just about an hour's drive from Seattle-Tacoma International Airport – as the perfect day trip. Turn off the highway onto Trek Drive and into a world of towering evergreen trees that is home to American bison, Roosevelt elk, woodland caribou, moose, deer, black bears, grizzly bears, cougars, coyotes, wolves, foxes, bobcats, Canada lynx, beavers, river otters, birds of prey and many other animals.



Visitors can hop aboard a tram for a 50-minute, naturalist-narrated tour of the 435-acre Free-Roaming Area. The herbivores live in this large expanse of forests and meadows, so trams pass through the home of bison, elk, caribou, moose, bighorn sheep, deer and other animals.

And at this time of year, there are calves in the bison, elk and caribou herds and lambs out in the meadows with their bighorn sheep mamas. Trams wind past Horseshoe Lake and climb up the hillside during their five-mile tours.

Plus, every visit to Northwest Trek includes the opportunity to saunter at leisure along paved pathways that lead to the predator exhibits featuring bears, wolves, foxes, coyotes, Canada lynx, bobcats and cougars. The wetlands exhibits showcase beavers, river otters, fishers, skunks, raccoons and badgers.

Northwest Trek embodies the vision of David T. "Doc" and Connie Hellyer, who donated their acreage to Metro Parks Tacoma in the early 1970s to preserve the land as a wildlife park.

The Hellyers knew their lake-and-forest-studded land in the shadow of Mount Rainier was something special, and they dreamed of bison and other animals roaming free in what they saw as a "highest and best" use of the property.

A \$2.5 million voter-approved bond issue financed Northwest Trek's development in the 1970s.

And when the wildlife park opened on July 17, 1975, then-Washington Gov. Dan Evans did the "ribbon cutting" honors. Instead of scissors and fabric, though, he chewed through a stack of logs with a chain saw.

In four decades, the wildlife park has fulfilled its promise as that gift of nature to generations.

More than 6.5 million visitors have walked through the gates. Northwest Trek now encompasses 725 acres and includes the Hellyer Natural History Center, Cheney Family Discovery Center, a Conservation Center and the Zip Wild complex of zip/line challenge courses.

It won two prestigious North American Conservation Awards from the Association of Zoos & Aquariums in recent years. The staff's work to reintroduce the Oregon spotted frog to the wild is known and praised throughout the Northwest.



And Northwest Trek continues to build for the future.

The \$1.9 million Kids' Trek nature-themed play area is scheduled to open next year.

"We are pleased that Northwest Trek is known around the world as a zoological park where visitors can view native animals and learn a great deal about the natural world," said Gary Geddes, director of Zoological and Environmental Education for Metro Parks Tacoma.

And just like that day 40 years ago when the governor fired up the chainsaw, there's still a lot of buzz in the air about Northwest Trek.

For more information about the birthday celebration, 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, a facility of Metro Parks Tacoma, is celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2015. It's located 35 miles southeast of Tacoma off State Highway 161.