



Northwest Trek
Wildlife Park

METRO PARKS TACOMA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Sept. 6, 2016

NORTHWEST TREK WILDLIFE PARK SETS ANNUAL ATTENDANCE RECORD OF 217,926 - AND STILL COUNTING - IN A BUSY 2016 THAT'S A YEAR FOR THE RECORD BOOKS

Opening of the Kids' Trek nature-inspired playground, the births of a moose calf and numerous other animals, and a stellar conservation message brought visitors to enjoy the great Northwest outdoors

EATONVILLE, Wash. – Nature called – with grunts and growls, hoots and howls, bleats and bellows. And the public answered in record-shattering numbers.

Northwest Trek Wildlife Park set a new annual attendance record of 215,604 on Sunday, with four months more to go before the books are closed on 2016.

That means every day for the rest of the year will be record-setting at the wildlife park that showcases native Northwest animals in natural settings and has a heart for conservation as big as the outdoors.

When the Meyerzon family of Bellevue walked through the turnstiles at 1:06 pm, they were the 214,697th, 214,698th, and 214,699th visitors of 2016, breaking the previous attendance record set on Dec. 31, 2015 – just eight months ago.



A toddler gets acquainted with a replica cougar cub in the Kids' Trek play area at Northwest Trek.

The Meyerzons' young son exclaimed that he had been watching SpongeBob earlier in the day and watched a character win a free ice cream for being the 100th customer. He thought that was an amazing coincidence.

Another 2,322 people visited the wildlife park on Monday, raising the record again to 217,926 at the conclusion of the Labor Day Weekend.

The new milestone comes amid a year of new adventures for people and new beginning for animals at the wildlife park, which is just a 45-minute drive from many places in the Puget Sound region and only an hour from Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. It's an easy-to-get-to oasis of nature where soaring evergreens and abundant plant life can help settle the jangled nerves of busy working families or give retirees a quick getaway.

"We believe our setting, the animals for which we care and our conservation story and record resonate with people across Washington and around the world," said Gary Geddes, director of Zoological and Environmental Education for Metro Parks Tacoma. "Our visitors come from as close as Eatonville and as far away as Europe and Asia, and they continually thank us for providing an unmatched experience in nature."

It's been a momentous year for Northwest Trek, which celebrated its 40th birthday in 2015 and its 41st just six weeks ago on July 17.

Highlights include:

- **Grand Opening of the Kids' Trek nature-inspired play area** on April 2 set a one-day attendance record and ushered in a new era at the wildlife park. In addition to the ability to view native Northwest wildlife in natural settings, kids from toddlers to tweens now have an opportunity to appreciate the outdoors in a new way. The half-acre, \$1.9 million play area features a giant replica tree stump for kids to climb into and out of; a pole for kids to slide down; three slides, including one that winds through a tunnel; nets to climb and play on; a toddler play area with sand and a weeping rock; a meandering stream; and a building area with logs. And everywhere kids look, there are touches of nature for exploration and learning, including animal and leaf imprints in the concrete walkways, huge tree rings and root wads, and a replica beaver complete with its dam.



- **Births of several animals**, including a set of beaver kit triplets, bison, elk and caribou calves in the spring, and a moose calf on June 12, have made 2016 a special year. The birth of Spruce the moose calf brings the number of moose in the 435-acre Free-Roaming Area to five and highlights the ongoing story of Northwest Trek's conservation of this species. The wildlife park took in three young moose orphans in the summer and fall of 2012. Two of them, Ellis and Connie, now have produced two calves, adding to the numbers of this large and engaging land mammal.



- **The American bison was named the National Mammal in the spring.** Northwest Trek is home to a herd of bison, named the National Mammal by President Barack Obama in the spring. Although bison once roamed the plains by the hundreds of thousands, their numbers are dwindling. A half-dozen bison calves were born at Northwest Trek this spring.

- **Leading the way in conservation**, Northwest Trek provides opportunities throughout the year for people to participate in Citizen Science opportunities like Nature Mapping. The wildlife park also is participating in an effort to reintroduce grizzly bears to the North Cascades.

"We know that the opening of Kids' Trek played a key role in this record-setting year," said Metro Parks Tacoma Commission President Erik Hanberg. "It is the largest capital improvement project in Northwest Trek's history, and it was funded by the voters of Tacoma and donors who are wonderful supporters of the wildlife park's mission."

About three-quarters of the funding for Kids' Trek came from the Northwest Trek Foundation, grants, and donations from companies and individuals. Money set aside in a Metro Parks Tacoma voter-approved bond issue also helped pay for the play area.



And there is more to come. Northwest Trek has a busy slate of activities to engage young and old alike in the wonders of nature during the upcoming fall and winter months. They include:

- **Senior Month:** Seniors age 65 and up can enjoy half-off general admission throughout September, plus discounts in the Forest Café, at the gift shop, and on Zip Wild zipline and challenge courses.

- **Run Wild:** Walkers and runners are drawn to this annual event, where Northwest Trek is transformed into a tranquil race setting. Race day is September 17 this year, with discounted

tickets available online through Sept. 14. www.nwtrek.org/run-wild.

- **Don't miss the rut:** Late summer and fall are exciting seasons at Northwest Trek. Visitors can learn about the exciting "rut," or breeding, rituals of hooved animals like deer, bighorn sheep, Roosevelt elk, and moose in the Free-Roaming Area.
- **Hoot 'n' Howl:** The spookiest event of the year, set for Oct. 21 and 22, includes crafts, trick-or-treating, and a special nighttime tram tour during which visitors can scout for animals in the dark. Activities run from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m.
- **Winter Wildland:** On Dec. 29 and 30, visitors can get in the holiday spirit while watching animals enjoy winter-themed enrichments like fruit, evergreen trees decorated with treats, ice piles, and snowmen.

Nearly 6.9 million visitors have walked through the turnstiles at Northwest Trek since the wildlife park opened on July 17, 1975. And the wildlife park is not only a unique treasure to the Northwest; it is one of only a handful of large-landscape wildlife parks in the nation.

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 moose.

Guests may also 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 4 p.m. Mondays through Fridays and 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays.

"We are gratified that so many people see the value of connecting with nature through the many touchpoints we offer at Northwest Trek – from viewing animals in the Free-Roaming Area or in their exhibits to seeing them up close at Trailside Encounters to touching animal artifacts like pelts and antlers to get a closer feel for the world around them," Deputy Director Alan Varsik said.

"The remainder of 2016 will be as awesome as the first eight months."

For more information about Northwest Trek, visit www.nwtrek.org

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.

Contacts:

Kris Sherman: 253-404-3800; 253-226-6718 or kris.sherman@pdza.org

Whitney DalBalcon: 253-404-3637 or whitney.dalbalcon@pdza.org

Cutlines:

1. A toddler gets up close to a replica of a cougar cub in the Kids' Trek play area at Northwest Trek Wildlife Park.
2. Beaver kit triplets were born in the spring. This photo was taken during a health checkup shortly after their births.
3. Spruce the moose calf is now nearly 3-months-old.
4. Northwest Trek has a herd of American bison, which grew by six calves this year. The bison was named the National Mammal in the spring by President Barack Obama.