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EAGLE PASSAGE OPENS AT NORTHWEST TREK WILDLIFE PARK AUG. 3

Bald eagles – the American icon saved from extinction – are the stars in this brand-new immersive, interactive habitat

Eatonville, Wash. – The eagles have landed at Northwest Trek Wildlife Park.

And no, we don't mean space travel. Four handsome bald eagles are set to take their place in Eagle Passage, a brand-new walk-through forested habitat that opens Saturday, August 3 with a public ribbon-cutting ceremony at 10 a.m.

Special eagle keeper chats will happen at 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Aug. 3-4.

Rescued from the wild with injuries that prevent them from fully flying, the birds have been cared for by other accredited zoos until their new home was finished at the Eatonville wildlife park.

"We are opening one of the most exciting, interactive animal habitats in the history of Northwest Trek and showcasing America's symbol – the bald eagle – in a breathtaking way," said Aaron Pointer, president of the Metro Parks Tacoma Board of Commissioners.

Eagle Passage is a unique habitat anchored to five towering Douglas firs in the heart of the park, close to the entrance. A walk-through, open-air tunnel immerses guests in the forested understory of vine maple, red alder, sword ferns and other native Northwest plants, letting them gaze up into the piercing yellow eyes of the eagles through a protective mesh.

In this interactive exhibit guests can spread their arms against a life-sized graphic of a bald eagle's wingspan, curl up in a life-sized "nest," learn about the story of how eagles were saved from extinction and make a pledge to protect wildlife at a digital kiosk.

"Seeing a bald eagle is always special," said Alan Varsik, director of Zoological and Environmental Education division for Metro Parks Tacoma. "We want the bald eagle, its

recovery story and message of hope to be a key experience at Northwest Trek. We believe this experience really highlights our conservation mission.”

Native to North America and once plentiful across the United States, bald eagles were close to extinction in the Lower 48 states by the middle of the 20th century. The Endangered Species Act and other laws, such as a ban on the pesticide DDT, afforded them the ability to safely reproduce. The species is no longer endangered and is more than a national symbol; it is an example of how people working together can help protect wild animals and wild places.

“Bald eagles – and this habitat – show that together, our voices and actions can make a difference,” said Northwest Trek Education Curator Jessica Moore.

But Eagle Passage does more than just inspire humans. It provides a unique home for rescued bald eagles that have limited flying ability.

Working closely with keepers, Northwest Trek horticulturalist Jake Pool has used real logs to create “walkways” over the higher structures of the habitat and perches of varying heights and thicknesses in real tree snags.

As well as being built for accessibility, Eagle Passage has also been created for sustainability.

The habitat’s outer mesh is cabled to the living trees via a special collar system used by the park’s ziplines, allowing the trees to grow naturally and healthily. And Pool has hauled up century-old fallen logs and Western red cedar stumps from the wildlife park’s Free-Roaming Area to create a rainforest-like habitat for the birds. Most of the smaller plants were either preserved on-site or salvaged from local building sites.

The non-profit Northwest Trek Foundation raised \$500,000 to finance the exhibit’s construction.

“People will be wowed by Eagle Passage,” said Foundation President Debi Gregory.

Entry to Eagle Passage is free with admission or membership to Northwest Trek. The wildlife park is open 9:30 a.m. – 6 p.m. daily through Labor Day.

For more information, see nwtrek.org/eaglepassage.

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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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