



NORTHWEST TREK WILDLIFE PARK IS ACCREDITED FOR ANOTHER FIVE YEARS FOLLOWING RIGOROUS REVIEW BY THE ASSOCIATION OF ZOOS & AQUARIUMS

Inspectors were particularly impressed with animal care, education and wildlife conservation

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EATONVILLE, Wash. – Northwest Trek Wildlife Park earned kudos and another five years of accreditation from the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) last week.

The Eatonville wildlife park, a facility of Metro Parks Tacoma, has been continuously accredited by the prestigious organization since it first applied for recognition in 1985.

“We know that Northwest Trek is well-regarded by guests, who return again and again,” said Andrea Smith, president of the Metro Parks Tacoma Board of Commissioners. “Our community can take great pride in knowing that our wildlife park is among the best in the country and a national leader in animal care, education and wildlife conservation.”

Accreditation by the association means the wildlife park has passed intensive inspection in every aspect of its operations, from animal care and education to conservation and guest experiences.

“Our rigorous standards are backed by science, constantly evolving, and rooted in animal well-being, which assures the public the animals at AZA-accredited facilities are receiving the best care possible,” said Dan Ashe, President and CEO of AZA.

The AZA inspection team that visited Northwest Trek in June called out several “Points of Particular Achievement” in its report. These included:

- **Animal care and well-being** are top priorities, as demonstrated by the comprehensive animal assessments and strong veterinary program. “All animals appear well-cared for by a devoted staff,” the inspectors said.
- **Wild Drive** has increased access opportunities and allowed guests to experience the Free-Roaming Area from their own vehicles, the inspectors noted.
- **Eagle Passage**, an award-winning habitat for rescued bald eagles, is a “well-designed experience” and encourages guests to take action in their own lives by making personal conservation pledges.
- **The educational programs** are “cutting edge,” the inspectors said. They highlighted the Wildlife Champions partnership with two underserved Tacoma elementary schools and the distance learning program with its “state-of-the-art” presentation studio.
- **Wildlife conservation initiatives** reflect the goals and mission of the organization. The inspectors cited Northwest Trek’s collaboration in the head-starting and reintroduction of

endangered northern leopard frogs and its participation in critical research to protect wild bats from white-nose syndrome.

The inspectors also praised Northwest Trek's green conservation practices, including three new eco-friendly restrooms, repurposing of building materials for reconfigured staff offices, and reuse of native plant species in new areas around the park. Finally, they said they were impressed by staff teamwork and the "exemplary" cleanliness throughout the wildlife park.

AZA's accreditation process includes a detailed application and meticulous on-site, multiple-day inspection by an independent team of expert zoological professionals. The inspecting team analyzes all aspects of the facility's operation, including animal care and well-being; keeper training; safety for guests, staff, and animals; educational programs; conservation efforts; veterinary programs; financial stability; risk management; and guest services. Finally, the accreditation commission interviews top officials at a formal hearing. AZA requires facilities to complete this rigorous accreditation process every five years.

Over the past decade, Northwest Trek has also been recognized with five of the association's major annual awards: two for conservation work on behalf of endangered species; one for excellence and innovation in exhibit design; one for efforts to advance scientific research; and one for marketing excellence.

"We are very pleased to be recognized by our peers," said Northwest Trek Director Alan Varsik. "This glowing report reflects the exceptional work our dedicated staff do every day to awaken deep connections in our community to Pacific Northwest wildlife."

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