

THE NORTHWEST ZOO AND AQUARIUM ALLIANCE

By Susan Hulbert and Jane Hartline



A tour of the Peregrine Fund headquarters was arranged after a recent NWZAA meeting in Boise.



Graphic design and conservation marketing interns from Oregon Zoo collaborated on the Odd Pet Gazette, a soon to be launched Web site that addresses responsible pet ownership.

Hybrid vehicles and green construction are among the strategies for reducing carbon emissions at Northwest Zoos. Point Defiance Zoo and Northwest Trek have new brightly-colored Priuses, and the Vancouver Aquarium has “gone for the gold” with LEED certification for their new learning center.



What could happen if all the zoos and aquariums in a region put their brains and resources together and applied them towards regional conservation initiatives? A lot!

The Northwest Zoo and Aquarium Alliance (NWZAA) has been meeting for two years and committees of staff from animal management, conservation, education, marketing and other departments of the various institutions are hard at work on four major initiatives: Northwest Species Recovery, Responsible Pet Ownership, Resource Conservation, and Backyard Sanctuaries.

Here is a rundown on each of these initiatives:

BACKYARD SANCTUARIES

Woodland Park Zoo already had a terrific workshop program



Backyard Habitat classes at the Woodland Park Zoo served as a starting point for programs at other Northwest institutions.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RYAN HAWK

on how to turn your backyard into a mini-wildlife refuge. Other member institutions jumped on the backyard bandwagon and are sharing ideas and resources to make this a region-wide effort with outreach programs, demonstration gardens, exhibits, interpretive displays and special events. Visitors are learning how to assess the current condition of their yards, how their yards could be made more friendly to wildlife, and are learning the steps for making those changes. Once they have done so, they are encouraged to certify their yard as wildlife-friendly.

The goals of this initiative are to:

- Provide people in our communities with the motivation, resources and skills necessary to manage habitat in their personal environments for the benefit of wildlife, people and the environment.
- Address current threats to biodiversity in the Pacific Northwest (habitat fragmentation, invasive species, pollution and a lack of personal connection with nature) by promoting responsible management of backyard habitats.

WISE PET CHOICES

All our institutions are weary of calls about unwanted parrots and snakes, and fear the environmental harm caused when pet turtles and aquarium fish are dumped into our native ecosystems. We also worry about people who take turtles and other animals out of the wild to keep as pets. Since Web sites like Craig's list have caused a proliferation of illegal and unadvisable pet sales, we are launching a Web site of our own – watch for it to appear in late fall. A communication plan on this topic includes strategies for pet-store owners, pet owners, parents, teachers with classroom pets, legislators and others.

RESOURCE CONSERVATION

Each member of the Zoo and Aquarium Alliance has its own green operations programs and lots of green strategies in place, but the Alliance Resource Conservation committee has set a goal



Woodland Park Zoo and Oregon Zoo have cooperated on a program for Oregon silverspot butterflies.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIN SULLIVAN

for reducing carbon emissions at all institutions. Members gathered data on their 2006 levels of resource consumption and waste output and reviewed the results to set specific targets and goals. Topics studied include water usage, electricity reduction, natural gas, vehicle fuel, building diesel, solid waste, recycling, animal waste and carbon offsets for employee commuting and travel.

SPECIES RECOVERY

Current ZAA joint recovery programs include captive breeding and reintroduction of Columbia Basin pygmy rabbits, head starting of Western pond turtles and augmenting populations of Oregon silverspot butterflies. Plans include a continued emphasis on butterfly conservation including habitat recovery, rearing practices, and volunteer opportunities. The group is also working on a sea otter disaster plan that will include partners such as the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and other agencies and NGOs, as well as the member institutions. Plans also include work on a predator conservation outreach program focusing on terrestrial animals like grizzly bears and wolves as well as marine animals including sharks and orcas. ZAA is also deliberating on

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GOAL

Generate interest in Northwest species conservation through public education programs, projects and research

MEMBERS

- Northwest Trek Wildlife Park
- Oregon Coast Aquarium
- Oregon Zoo
- Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium
- Seattle Aquarium
- Vancouver (BC) Aquarium
- Woodland Park Zoo
- Zoo Boise

PARTNERS

- Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- National Wildlife Federation
- The Nature Conservancy

CURRENT INITIATIVES

- Northwest Species Recovery
- Wise Pet Choices
- Resource Conservation
- Backyard Sanctuaries

FUNDING SOURCE

Each institution provides two cents per visitor toward Alliance programs and the salary of a conservation director.

amphibian recovery efforts with the first focus being the Oregon spotted frog. The focus will involve activities such as recovery plan writing, captive breeding/rearing, reintroduction, and training.

“Regional partnerships with other zoos and aquariums are important to the Seattle Aquarium and all of us. Working together, we can leverage resources and expertise to carry out research and conservation efforts that would otherwise not be possible,” said John Braden, director of the Seattle Aquarium.

EVOLUTION OF THE ALLIANCE

In the 1980s, Warren Iliff, director of Washington Park Zoo (now Oregon Zoo) proposed kiosks at AZA accredited facilities to promote visits to other Pacific Northwest facilities. He hoped this would lead to joint programs.

As AZA began encouraging regional efforts to focus on native wildlife, Northwest directors began to organize. Current Oregon Zoo Director, Tony Vecchio, was familiar with AZA Board initiatives and began the discussion. The Northwest directors agreed from the beginning that funding was critical and settled on two cents per visitor from each organization being committed to a NWZAA budget.

Funding strategies differ among alliance members. For example, Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium and Northwest Trek Wildlife Park, both facilities of Metro Parks Tacoma, chose to commit the funds out of their budgets. Steve Burns, Zoo Boise director, came up with the novel approach of a conservation surcharge on admission. Oregon Zoo followed suit.

Gary Geddes, director of the Zoological Environmental Education Department at Metro Parks Tacoma became the first chair of the group.

Many challenges have arisen along the path – differences in sizes of facilities, policies, associations, political bodies, focus of the institution, etc., but the ZAA is proof these challenges can be overcome.

Benefits go beyond just projects getting done. Staff participants in ZAA committees have found it enriching to share ideas and methods.

“NWZAA provides an opportunity to participate in conservation programs on a greater scale than if we worked alone,” said Steve Burns.

Having dedicated funding and a commitment by the organization directors are the keys to the group’s future successes.

“It’s also essential to believe that you can accomplish more in partnerships than you can individually, regardless of the disparity in size between the members,” Geddes said.

Interest in membership has been shown by non-AZA facilities, but an early decision by the directors was to restrict the group to AZA members only. They may later consider affiliate status for groups also dedicated to protecting and enhancing native north-west wildlife.

Deborah Jensen, Zoo and Aquarium Alliance Treasurer said, “The Alliance is a wonderful partnership among accredited institutions in the Pacific Northwest which will increase our conservation impact.”

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