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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THE MILWAUKEE COUNTY ZOO TO OPEN ADVENTURE AFRICA PHASE I: ELEPHANT EXHIBIT

MILWAUKEE, WI - - The Milwaukee County Zoo is proud to announce its new Elephant Exhibit, transforming one-fourth of the Zoo's current layout, will officially open to visitors **Saturday, May 4**, with a "grand reveal" and opening day activities at 10 a.m.

"The new Elephant Exhibit has been a monumental and heartfelt project for many Zoo staff since the commitment was made in 2013 to keep African elephants in the collection," says Zoo Director Chuck Wikenhauser. "This first phase of the Adventure Africa project showcases African elephants and the various state-of-the-art amenities and renovations necessary to give these animals the best possible care throughout their lives. This is an exciting time for the Zoo and our visitors, and we couldn't be happier."

The new 20,000-square-foot Elephant Care Center features a recreation room with both sand and padded floors, five individual stalls for training and husbandry (allowing the elephants to participate in their own healthcare) and expansive space for enrichment activities.

(more)

MCZ Elephant Exhibit 2019/Add one

Indoor enrichment items include hay-filled barrels that zookeepers are able to hang from the ceiling which allow the elephants to exercise their trunk muscles, reaching up to these high-hanging devices. Elephants in the wild would behave similarly, reaching high into the tree canopies, extending their trunks for branches and leaves to eat.

The 1.6-acre outdoor habitat (which alone is 4 times greater in size than the entire former Elephant Exhibit) features a watering hole, able to accommodate three fully-submerged elephants, feeding and enrichment walls, shade structures and even a self-activating shower. A demonstration pavilion with shaded visitor seating allows an up-close look at how keepers work with the elephants to offer the highest level of care through daily training and interactions.

Through interpretive graphics and interactives, the exhibit depicts “A Day in the Life of an Elephant,” highlighting daily routines for elephants living in human care and elephants living in the wild. It’s the Zoo’s hope that visitors see the overriding goal was to make this entire habitat, both indoor and out, the most normal as possible for elephant behavior in a zoo setting, while also addressing the physical, social and psychological needs of the animals.

The Conservation Outpost (the re-purposed Wolf Woods cabin) serves to educate visitors about elephants, through audio and visual interpretations, and includes an important “call to action” for visitor involvement in the plight of wild elephants. With the situation of elephants in the wild so precarious, it’s important for those who truly care about elephants to take action before it’s too late. (Elephants are currently listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN -- International Union for Conservation of Nature -- Red List of Threatened Species.)

(more)

MCZ Elephant Exhibit 2019/Add two

Two new mixed species exhibits complement the Elephant Exhibit: the African Forest displays bongo and yellow-back duiker, and Impala Plains features zebra, impala and African crowned cranes.

The new exhibit meets the Association of Zoo and Aquariums' (AZA) standards for elephant care and can accommodate up to five elephants, including bull (male) elephants. The Zoo will keep current elephants, Ruth and Brittany, and investigate options for additional elephants to bring in.

“Of the 235 AZA-accredited zoos in the U.S., 66 currently display elephants,” continues Wikenhauser. “Having these magnificent animals in our care is a privilege and a responsibility we do not take lightly; we’re committed to giving them the best life possible.”

The \$16.6 million Elephant Exhibit and the complementing mixed species exhibits were made possible with half of the funds coming from the Zoological Society of Milwaukee, and the remaining half funded by Milwaukee County.

“I’m thrilled for the residents of Milwaukee County to share and enjoy this very significant addition to the Zoo,” comments Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele. “The renovations were necessary, not only for the elephants, but for the staff’s ability to offer the highest level of care. The new exhibit also keeps pace with the quality of animal exhibits at other Midwest zoos.”

The Zoo anticipates that the Elephant Exhibit will draw new visitors to the area; the next closest accredited zoo exhibiting elephants is currently the Indianapolis Zoo.

(more)

MCZ Elephant Exhibit 2019/Add three

The Zoo's subsequent projects for Adventure Africa (part of the Zoo's current masterplan), continue with changes to the existing Hippo and Rhino Exhibits slated to open in 2020-2023.

For more information on the new Elephant Exhibit, please contact the Zoo's Marketing and Communications Department at 414.256.5466.

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The Milwaukee County Zoo has been continuously accredited by AZA since 1976. Less than 10% of animal exhibitors registered with USDA have achieved AZA-accreditation status.