

For Immediate Release
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Two Grizzly Bear Sisters to come to Dane County as the First New Residents for the Future Arctic Passage Exhibit

Major donor lays out an “Arctic Passage Community Challenge” in support of Henry Vilas Zoo’s exhibit and the quest to bring the bears back

MADISON – Two exciting announcements today are major strides towards opening the Henry Vilas Zoo’s Arctic Passage exhibit by the summer of 2015.

Dane County Executive Joe Parisi and Zoo Director Ronda Schwetz announced that the zoo has identified the first new inhabitants of Arctic Passage. Two adorable grizzly bear sisters are now being kept at the Dakota Zoo in Bismarck, N.D., as Arctic Passage is being built and they will move to Madison next year.

And the Friends of the Henry Vilas Zoo today announced that an anonymous donor will contribute \$50,000 towards the completion of the zoo’s new Arctic Passage, if the community matches it with donations totaling \$100,000. The “Arctic Community Passage Challenge” begins today and will last through Oct. 31. It is aimed at raising the last \$700,000 needed to make the Arctic Passage a reality. Tax-deductible donations can be made at the zoo’s website, www.vilaszoo.org.

“The Friends of the Henry Vilas Zoo has been deeply appreciative of the community’s support as we have moved closer to our goal for Arctic Passage,” said Alison Prange, executive director of the Friends. “We are very grateful to our most recent donor, who has challenged the community to help us fill a sizable portion of what remains to be raised to complete the Arctic Passage. We encourage anyone interested in supporting Arctic Passage to give now and have his or her donation matched by our generous donor.”

The grizzly sister bears were orphaned in Montana when multiple attempts to relocate their mother to a remote area away from areas populated by humans were unsuccessful. She was humanely euthanized. Her two female grizzly cubs were left with no one to care for them. Dakota Zoo, an Association of Zoos and Aquariums-accredited (AZA) facility stepped up and agreed to take them in.

But when the Dakota Zoo officials arrived in Montana they found two sets of grizzly cubs that needed a home. Knowing the second set could be euthanized if they did not take them, zoo officials agreed to take all four.

Two years later, the community-supported Henry Vilas Zoo joins the story. The four cubs had grown into beautiful, active and much larger bears and the Dakota Zoo was looking to find a home with enough room for two adult bears.

“We are grateful to the Dakota Zoo in Bismarck for rescuing these great animals and caring for them before they come to our home at Dane County’s Henry Vilas Zoo,” said Dane County Executive Joe Parisi. “The Dakota Zoo’s care for the grizzly bear sisters, and their coming move to our zoo is a model for how zoos can be involved in animal conservation. Arctic Passage is designed to play a strong role in conservation and we will be proud to welcome these grizzly bear sisters as part of those efforts.”

“The story of the grizzly girls who will make Arctic Passage home reinforces the role of AZA zoos like the Dane County’s Henry Vilas Zoo in animal conservation,” said Ronda Schwetz, the zoo’s director. “We have designed Arctic Passage as a place that could help rescued bears like our two grizzly sisters and we are thrilled to give these two bears a permanent home in our community.”

Arctic Passage is the largest expansion on zoo grounds in its 103-year history, covering more than 1.7 acres. It will provide guests with exciting new features like the zoo’s first indoor restaurant and beautiful naturalistic environments for polar bears, grizzly bears and harbor seals. These exhibits will enable zoo guests to see the seals swim underwater, the polar bears sleep in their den and grizzly bears catch a fish from a stream. The Arctic Passage also will feature special new education, conservation and sustainability features that continue the zoo’s leadership in these areas.

Arctic Passage is scheduled to open next summer.

Please note: Photographs of the two grizzly bears in their temporary home in North Dakota are attached. Further details of their story can be found here: www.vilaszoo.org as well as the link to donate to the Arctic Passage Community Challenge.

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