



For Immediate Release

Contact: Rod Hise, Friends of the Zoo, 608-770-7850

Melanie Conklin, Dane Co Executive Office, 608-267-8823

New red pandas, Somali wild asses and grizzly bears to make zoo home in 2015

Zoo asks for community support on Giving Tuesday to bring new animals to enhance the zoo's conservation efforts

MADISON, Wis., Dec. 1 – County Executive Joe Parisi, Zoo Director Ronda Schwetz and Friends of the Zoo Director Alison Prange today revealed the identities of the three sets of animals that will make Henry Vilas Zoo their new home in 2015. The new zoo residents will be a pair of red pandas, two Somali wild asses and grizzly bear sisters. The announcement comes the day before Giving Tuesday, during which the zoo hopes the community will support bringing these animals to their new home.

“Each of these sets of animals represent an important part of the zoo’s contribution to conservation efforts around the world, in addition to enhancing the experience of our zoo guests,” said County Executive Joe Parisi. “Henry Vilas Zoo has always been a community-supported zoo and we encourage the community to actively support the zoo tomorrow during this year’s Giving Tuesday.”

Giving Tuesday is a global day dedicated to giving back, following on the heels of the Black Friday and Cyber Monday shopping days. The Friends of the Henry Vilas Zoo will take part in Giving Tuesday again this year to raise funds to support bringing these new animals to the zoo.

The three animals - red pandas, Somali wild asses and grizzly bears – are very different but would share a common purpose for their journeys to the Henry Vilas Zoo as a part of the zoo’s conservation efforts. The two new red pandas, threatened in the wild, would arrive to be

paired with the zoo's current two red pandas. Somali wild asses are critically endangered, so providing a safe place for a population of these animals in zoos is one crucial part of the worldwide effort to save the species. The grizzly bear sisters coming to the zoo were orphaned in the wild due to the conflicts between humans and grizzly bears, leaving them no place to go other than an AZA-accredited zoo.

The red pandas at the zoo are one of the zoo's most popular species. The male red panda Lum is past breeding age and being retired. The Red Panda Species Survival Plan will send a new male of breeding age to pair with the zoo's breeding-aged female, Tai. The zoo also will receive a female to be Lum's retirement companion. Red pandas live in forests throughout the Himalayas and are threatened due to deforestation and other human activities.

"We are very pleased to be expanding the number and kinds of animals at the zoo," said Zoo Director Ronda Schwetz. "Conservation is a very important part of our mission and these animals represent our involvement in those efforts. Giving Tuesday provides the community with a chance to lend its support to the zoo's growing role in global animal conservation."

Somali wild asses are critically endangered. There are fewer than 600 of these animals in the wild and fewer than 60 in captivity in North America. The Vilas Zoo will be the ninth institution on the continent that will house this species. The Somali wild ass is one of the rarest wild relatives of the horse. Its main threats in the wild are hunting for use as food or in medicine, and competition with livestock for food and water.

Last year on Giving Tuesday, the Friends of the Zoo raised more than \$10,000 which allowed the zoo to bring Pelo, a young male lion to the zoo to join the lioness, Shakura. This year, the Friends' Giving Tuesday goal is to raise \$10,000 to support bringing these three new sets of animals to the zoo.

"Giving Tuesday is an important part of the Friends' efforts to support our zoo," said Alison Prange, Executive Director of Friends of the Henry Vilas Zoo. "This year, the community can support bringing not just one new animal to the zoo, but three different types of animals. We hope the community will help us welcome these new animals to their new homes at Henry Vilas Zoo."

The grizzly bear sisters who will make the zoo's new Arctic Passage exhibit home in 2015 were saved after their mother and grandmother became a threat to humans and livestock in Montana. To save the cubs, they needed to find a home in an AZA-accredited zoo, which the Henry Vilas Zoo was fortunately able to provide. The new Arctic Passage exhibit was designed to accommodate rescued grizzlies because human-grizzly conflicts are becoming increasingly common.

To learn more about the new animals who the Henry Vilas Zoo hopes to welcome over the next year, or to make a donation to support the efforts to bring them to Madison, please visit www.vilaszo.org.