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For Immediate Release
March 22, 2023

FRESNO CHAFFEE ZOO AWARDED SPECIAL FUNDING FROM U.S. NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION (NSF) AND THE PAUL G. ALLEN FAMILY FOUNDATION

Fresno, CA – Fresno Chaffee Zoo is honored to announce that it is one of six recipients whose projects will be funded by a partnership between the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation. This funding will assist the Zoo in their conservation program to restore a recently lost population of blunt-nosed leopard lizards in Fresno County, CA and monitor rewilded animals throughout their lives to understand better the traits that allow successful recolonization.

“The breadth of biodiversity loss in the United States is reflected in the wide range of species covered in these six projects. While the approaches are different, each study addresses systemic issues that are much bigger than a singular species, and they leverage science and technology to accelerate conservation solutions,” said Lara Littlefield, Executive Director on behalf of the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation. “The increased number of new-to-NSF applicants also tells us that there is untapped potential for more collaboration between primary research and applied technology.”

Collectively, the projects funded by this partnership will combine scientific research and conservation activities to learn from and protect Earth’s biodiversity, with a focus on protecting diverse ecosystems and imperiled species across the country.

“More than 1,000,000 species across the globe are threatened with extinction and these projects are a step towards decreasing that number and slowing the rate of biodiversity loss on Earth,” said Simon Malcomber, acting assistant director for NSF’s Directorate for Biological Sciences. “These efforts are critical as losing any species impacts society, whether by changes in disease patterns, decreases in natural pest control, ecosystem degradation, or by losing one of life’s unique solutions to problems that humans could’ve harnessed to our benefit.”

In 2020, the Zoo joined the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Fresno State to take emergency action by collecting the last seven blunt-nosed leopard lizards from the Panoche Plateau and creating a captive breeding program. Over the past few years, Fresno Chaffee Zoo has maintained the breeding program and collected vital data that improves our understanding of this endangered species.

Earlier this year, in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Reclamation, the Zoo broke ground on its Conservation Action Center. This new facility provides guests with the opportunity to see the Zoo’s conservation work in action. Guests will be able to view the day-to-day operations of the critical care and research it takes to help save the blunt-nosed leopard lizard. The Conservation Action Center will serve as the anchor of the Zoo’s future conservation initiatives.

“The blunt-nosed leopard lizard breeding program is a catalyst for the Zoo’s impact in local conservation work,” said Fresno Chaffee Zoo CEO and Director Jon Forrest Dohlin. “This is a major milestone for the Zoo. We have supported several conservation organizations over the years, and now, thanks to our partnerships,

and this funding from NSF and the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, we are poised to become leaders in local conservation science to help save native California species.”

Fresno Chaffee Zoo will begin repatriating some of the blunt-nosed leopard lizards back to the Panoche Plateau this spring and their Conservation Action Center is scheduled to open by the end of 2023. The \$1.2 million grant from NSF and the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation will allow the Zoo to monitor every rewilded lizard and their offspring to assess recolonization success. Funds will also support a new internship program allowing under-represented communities to play an active role in conservation science. Fresno Chaffee Zoo intends to take the lessons learned from this project and apply them to other threatened populations in California’s Central Valley and help them further their mission to save wildlife.

More information on the [Partnership to Advance Conservation Science and Practice program](#) and the full list of awards is available at [nsf.gov](https://www.nsf.gov).

About Fresno Chaffee Zoo: Centrally located in Fresno, California, Fresno Chaffee Zoo is a 39-acre Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) accredited zoo. It is home to over 200 different species and features WOW experiences—from Sea Lion Cove to African Adventure—that teach guests about animals from across the globe and the conservation efforts to protect them. The Zoo welcomes over 800,000 guests annually, offering a world-class guest experience and conservation education to all who visit. The mission of Fresno Chaffee Zoo is to inspire people to care for animals, create connections, build community and save wildlife.