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PHOENIX ZOO ANNOUNCES OPENING OF BRAND NEW “BIG CATS OF ARIZONA” HABITAT IN APRIL 2025

PHOENIX (February 12, 2025) - The Arizona Center for Nature Conservation (ACNC)/Phoenix Zoo is thrilled to announce the grand opening of its Big Cats of Arizona: A Bridge to Arizona Wilderness, habitat in early April, a state-of-the-art space dedicated to showcasing and caring for some of Arizona’s most elusive native predators – mountain lions and jaguars.

Thanks to the generosity of donors, more than \$5.3 million was raised to bring this expansive habitat to life, providing more than double the increase in space for the Zoo’s two jaguars, Caipora and Saban, participants in the Species Survival Plan (SSP), which ensures the sustainability of zoo-managed populations. Additionally, the Zoo’s two mountain lion sisters, Sierra and Mystic, found as abandoned orphans in South Dakota in 2007, will move into a space five times larger than their current home, offering them ample room to explore, play and thrive.

“Big Cats of Arizona is an exciting and necessary expansion that will not only enhance the well-being of these incredible animals but also provide unparalleled experience for our guests,” said Bert Castro, President and CEO of the Phoenix Zoo. “Mountain lions and jaguars are vital parts of Arizona’s ecosystem, yet they are rarely seen in the wild. This new habitat will allow us to educate the public about their historical ranges and the importance of conserving these species for future generations.”

The new habitat is designed to improve visibility for guests, featuring multiple viewing angles and windows that will allow guests to observe these majestic cats like never before. The habitat also boasts the Zoo’s first-ever “catwalk,” allowing guests to walk directly below the big cats as they move overhead throughout the space. The area will include educational messaging about the historical ranges of these species and a water feature to encourage natural behavior and enrichment.

Construction of Big Cats of Arizona habitat began in November of 2023 and should be completed in early March of 2025. The Zoo plans to move the mountain lions and jaguars into their new homes in March as well, then allow them time to acclimate behind the scenes. While they are adjusting to their new surroundings, they will not be immediately visible to the public. This transition period is essential to ensure they feel comfortable and secure before they are introduced to Zoo members and guests.

Member Preview: Friday April 4 & Saturday, April 5, from 9 a.m. – Noon

Phoenix Zoo members are welcome to wind their way through this impressive experience and will enjoy members-only activity stations, raffles and more.

Grand Opening to the Public: Saturday, April 5, at 12:30 p.m.

MEDIA MATERIAL: Video is available via this Dropbox link:

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/9f9jhe7dfbhvavsm8mo46/AN7km_JWSE3aNXdfqPJq-y0?rlkey=581j5jko0rgv0kv9ikoyuszlu&st=yyfl201u&dl=0

Credit: Phoenix Zoo

About the Arizona Center for Nature Conservation

The Arizona Center for Nature Conservation operates the Phoenix Zoo. The ACNC advances the stewardship and conservation of animals and their habitats while providing experiences that inspire people and motivate them to care for the natural world.

The Phoenix Zoo is the only zoo in the Valley accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and is a non-profit zoological park, serving 1.4 million guests annually. The Zoo is home to more than 3,000 animals, many of which are endangered and threatened species. For information on upcoming events, exhibits and activities at the Phoenix Zoo, visit

www.phoenixzoo.org.