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**For Immediate Release**

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**FRESNO CHAFFEE ZOO CELEBRATES GROUNDBREAKING OF  
CONSERVATION ACTION CENTER IN PARTNERSHIP WITH  
THE BUREAU OF RECLAMATION AND U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE  
SERVICE**

*Fresno, CA* – Fresno Chaffee Zoo celebrated the groundbreaking of its Conservation Action Center in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Reclamation on Monday, February 13, 2023.

“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, we are poised to become leaders in local conservation science to help save native California species.”

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 collect the last of the blunt-nosed leopard lizards from the Panoche Plateau to create 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 the endangered species. Now, in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Reclamation, the Zoo will begin construction on its Conservation Action Center.

"The construction and operation of this center will be a vital part to recovering the blunt-nosed leopard lizard and many other species. Endangered species recovery is complex and difficult work, and the Service is grateful to the Fresno Chaffee Zoo and all our partners for their commitment to ensuring this species has a future in California," said Michael Fris, field supervisor of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife's Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office.

The Conservation Action Center is funded through a series of grants provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Reclamation. A portion of the building is being funded through Measure Z.

“The community has always supported our Zoo in our endeavors to help save species worldwide,” said Chief Operations Officer Lyn Myers. "Now, thanks to our partners and our communities’ support through Measure Z, we can become leaders in local conservation in the Central Valley.”

The Conservation Action Center will serve as the anchor of the Zoo’s future conservation initiatives. 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 begin construction immediately and open at the end of the year.

**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.

**About the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

**About Blunt-Nosed Leopard Lizards:** Blunt-nosed leopard lizards are only found in the San Joaquin Desert of central California, within the San Joaquin Valley and adjacent foothills, as well as the Carrizo Plain and Cuyama Valley. These lizards inhabit sparsely vegetated areas. The lizard uses rodent burrows for coverage from the harsh desert heat and is known to pounce on prey. The blunt-nosed leopard lizard is a relatively large lizard with a long tail; long, powerful legs; and a short, blunt snout. Adult males typically range in size from 3.4 to 4.7 inches in length, excluding their tail, and females are about 3.4 to 4.4 inches in length, excluding their tail. Darker than other leopard lizards, blunt-nosed leopard lizards vary in color and pattern on their backs. Their background color ranges from yellowish or light gray-brown to dark brown, depending on the surrounding soil color and vegetation. Habitat disturbance, destruction, and fragmentation are the greatest threats to blunt-nosed leopard lizard populations.

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