



## **Nature Center receives major grant: "New amphitheater will benefit entire town"**

11/18/21: Diana Butler, President of the White Mountain Nature Center released the following:

We are gratified today to announce that the Nature Center has been awarded a grant of \$250,000 from the Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT). The AOT grant program was designed to help across the state, but especially to help certain organizations located in rural communities that depend on tourism. Although Pinetop-Lakeside as a whole weathered the worst of the Covid-19 storm, the Nature Center was heavily affected - in 2020 almost all of the programs (including fund raising) were cancelled.

Thankfully, the Nature Center pulled through in good shape thanks to some generous donations and by leasing out some of its property. The purpose of this grant is to help expand tourism opportunities in our community. For the Nature Center that means a new, multi-use complex including an amphitheater and supporting infrastructure, to operate a world-class Raptor Flight Show. Tourists, residents, and their guests will all benefit.

In September the Nature Center announced a partnership with Balinda Strosnider and John Glitsos, of Land on Sky Wildlife Experiences to bring raptor shows to the White Mountains, starring Funky the owl, and several other awe-inspiring raptors. Land on Sky personnel helped write the AOT grant application.

Construction of the complex to house and train the raptors (shown below) will begin shortly at the Nature Center. It was designed by WDM Architects of Wichita, Kansas, who designed the new amphitheater at the Phoenix Zoo, and donated their time for the first phase of this project! The company that presents the bird shows at Disney World is assisting with staging, and scripting for the shows and is also donating their time.

Contractors in the area are contributing their time and talents as well. Dan Brooks Surveying of Show Low donated the topographical survey required to begin architecture. Zeb Doll of Sheeran Consulting donated engineering and David Morris of Western Pine Development is donating his time as the general contractor. The project is receiving support from all sorts of businesses in the area, including the Town of Pinetop-Lakeside.

The initial structures include a giant netted training enclosure and viewing patio. Daily training sessions will be available FREE to the public. It is hoped that watching training inspires the community and attracts donations essential in feeding and care of the animals and completing the infrastructure project; including lighting, sound, landscaping, and other critical components.

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*Dedicated to connecting people with wildlife and nature through educational experiences that inspire appreciation, responsibility, and respect for the natural world we share.*

Site Plan of new Facility (Nature Center is on the left):



The Amphitheater (below) will be located on a particularly attractive spot in the rear of the Nature Center property, overlooking a pond and wetlands area and some open forest land. It will incorporate comfortable seating, handicapped access, and a multi-function stage.



"Having a first-class facility like this in our community will open up all kinds of new opportunities," Butler noted. In addition to the raptor shows, she envisions it being used for community events - meetings and presentations, music shows, weddings, perhaps even for showing outdoor movies.

Donations to the building fund are being accepted now at [www.WMNature.org](http://www.WMNature.org)