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TAMPA'S LOWRY PARK ZOO TO RELEASE FIVE REHABILITATED MANATEES IN CRYSTAL RIVER

Survivors Get Second (and Third) Chance at Life in Florida Waters

TAMPA, Fla. (February 15, 2010) – Five endangered manatees rehabilitated at the David A. Straz Jr. Manatee Hospital at Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo are scheduled to be released into Florida waters Tuesday, February 16 at Three Sisters Spring in Crystal River, a national wildlife refuge. One animal, Baby Coral, will be transported directly from the Zoo. Four other manatees will be transported from Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park, where they have resided for the last month after being transferred from the Straz Manatee Hospital.

Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo reached a new record-high patient load of 17 manatees at one time this January at the Straz Manatee Hospital. Seven animals in stable condition were relocated temporarily (including four mentioned above) to ensure the facility had space to accommodate critical care patients. Previously, the highest number of manatees at one time in the Straz Manatee Hospital was 16 which occurred in 2008.

"As the only critical care manatee facility on the West Coast of Florida, we are pleased to have the facilities and experience to give these endangered animals a second - or even third - chance at life," said Dr. Larry Killmar, Zoo director of collections. "The record cold snap was an unusual event, and may be a wakeup call about what it will take to support this endangered species in the future if any climate control legislation requires power plants to recover all their warm water effluence on which manatees rely for their survival."

The Zoo has treated more than 200 manatees since opening the facility in 1991, successfully rehabilitating and releasing more than half of those patients with the goal of returning each one back to its native waters. The Zoo receives rescue animals for a great many reasons, the most common being boat strikes, orphans, cold stress, red tide and entanglement.

On Tuesday, February 16, the Zoo's manatee rehab team will transport Baby Coral from the Straz Manatee Hospital to Crystal River. She will be lifted out of the medical pools by crane and transferred into the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute transport vehicle for the trip. She will be released into Three Sisters Spring upon arrival.

Following her release, Zoo staff will proceed to Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park to conduct health assessments, transport and release four manatees known as Myra, Coral Lee, Little Nap and Nephew at the same location.

The area of Crystal River, Florida is renowned for its pristine waters and natural splendor. Much of the area is designated as a national wildlife refuge where manatees and other endangered and threatened species live year-round.

Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo works in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and its Florida Wildlife Research Institute, and numerous manatee rehabilitation partners to rescue, rehabilitate and release Florida's endangered manatees.

About The Manatees

Baby Coral is a repeat patient at the Straz Manatee Hospital, returning with cold stress this January during the record cold temperatures. She previously spent two years at the Zoo (March 26, 2007-Feb. 27, 2009) as the dependent calf of an adult female (Momma Coral) who suffered a severe boat strike injury. Baby Coral weighed just 185 pounds when she arrived at the Zoo in 2007 and matured to a strong and healthy 960 pounds over two years. As a naïve manatee, she was monitored following her release, and was rescued for the second time Jan. 8, 2010 after she was tracked to an area in Southwest Florida where water temperatures reached dangerous levels. She weighed 665 pounds upon rescue, nearly 300 pounds less than her release weight. She had regained more than 100 pounds in the past few weeks.

Coral Lee, Myra and Little Nap were rescued as orphans and raised by the Zoo's manatee rehab team. Respectively, they weighed 75 pounds, 85 pounds and 160 pounds upon arrival at the Zoo in 2007 and 2008. The three manatees (who upon last weights in 2009 were 685 pounds, 680 pounds and 820 pounds) were relocated to Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park on January 17, 2010 for housing until release. As naïve manatees, these three will be fitted with post-release tracking devices by the Sea to Shore Alliance to allow wildlife officials to monitor their adaptation to the wild.

Nephew arrived at the Zoo a year ago (January 2009) with cold stress. He was rescued at 350 pounds and had grown to 625 pounds upon his last weight.

About The Organizations

The Florida Manatee and Aquatic Center and David A. Straz Jr. Manatee Hospital at Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo expand the traditional boundaries of a zoo, focusing efforts on critical care for injured, sick and orphaned wild manatees. It is the only non-profit hospital in the world specifically dedicated to the treatment of these endangered animals, and one of three manatee critical care facilities in the state of Florida. The Zoo is operated by the Lowry Park Zoological Society, an independent 501(c)(3) charitable organization committed to excellence in education, conservation and research. For more information, visit www.LowryParkZoo.com. Also find the Zoo on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) is the lead on manatee rescues, assists in manatee releases, conducts applied research, and provides scientific information used to protect, conserve and manage Florida's marine resources. For more information, visit <http://research.myfwc.com/> or contact Carli Segelson at (727) 896-8626, ext. 2076. To report a dead or distressed manatee, call the FWC Wildlife Alert Hotline at 888-404-FWCC (3922).

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages the 93 million-acre [National Wildlife Refuge System](#) of more than 520 National Wildlife Refuges. The Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge in Crystal River was established primarily to protect waterfowl habitat and is home to over 250 species of birds, over 50 species of reptiles and amphibians, and at least 25 different species of mammals, including the endangered West Indian manatee. For more information about the National Wildlife Refuge System, visit <http://www.fws.gov/refuges/>.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Florida Park Service - Created in 1935 by the Florida Legislature, Florida State Parks has grown from eight to 160 parks over the last 75 years. Today, the Florida Park Service manages more than 700,000 acres of Florida's natural environment, including 100 miles of beaches, eight National Historic Landmarks and 39 sites on the National Register of Historic Places. Florida State Parks has been recognized by the National Recreation and Park Association as the nation's first and only two-time Gold Medal winner for the nation's best park service. To learn more about Florida State Parks, visit www.FloridaStateParks.org.

Sea to Shore Alliance was created to form a partnership of specialists and stakeholders with the expertise, passion, and vision to help reverse the degradation of our aquatic coastal environment, loss of species and diversity. The outcome will help to ensure the health and productivity of coastal ecosystems. One of the Alliance's projects is to monitor rehabilitated and released manatees to better ensure their survival and adaptation to the wild. For more information, visit <http://www.sea2shore.org/>