



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **A Tale of Two Manatee Tails**

### **One Headed for Release, the Second Receiving Ongoing Care**

May 11, 2018 – *Jacksonville, FL* – Seven weeks ago, two cold stressed manatees were rescued and brought to Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens' Manatee Critical Care Center. Now, one is ready to be released into local waters, while the other is still undergoing treatment.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) responded to a report of a beached manatee in Vilano Beach, St. John's County, on Saturday, March 17. The adult male was showing signs of cold stress, exhaustion and dehydration. The 9'2" animal was transported to the Zoo's Critical Care Center where he was able to immediately begin treatment for his condition.

Over the course of the last seven weeks, Zoo Animal Hospital staff cared for the manatee affectionately called Vilanzo. He quickly found his appetite, and with it, his energy levels rose. Vilanzo received a clean bill of health on May 3 and is scheduled to be released in the intracoastal on Tuesday, May 15.

One of his keepers, Ashten, put it best by describing Vilanzo as being, "a completely different animal as when he first arrived. He presented as a lethargic manatee and is going to be leaving the Critical Care center as a healthy and very active animal."

His story has an ideal ending. From the civilians on the beach who called FWC, FWC's response and the decision to bring him to the Zoo's Manatee Critical Care Center, and the wonderful care he received at the Zoo, Vilanzo has been fortunate. His return to Florida waters is a testament to how effective the Manatee Rescue and Rehabilitation partnership is and shows the Jacksonville Zoo's commitment to the full continuum of care for these gentle giants.

Less than a week after Vilanzo was rescued and brought to the Zoo, FWC received a report about a manatee stranded in receding waters of Miller Creek in the St. Nicholas neighborhood of Jacksonville. This large adult male has had a different rehabilitation story.

After a muddy rescue that included muscle-power from Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department, FWC, Sea to Shore Alliance and Zoo staff were able to transport the manatee to the Zoo's Critical Care Center. Veterinarian, Dr. Yousuf Jafarey, began treatment of the animal within minutes of the manatee arriving.

Right away, it was apparent this animal was not in great shape. While bloodwork was looking stable, the manatee was listless and suffering from severe cold stress. His respiration was rapid and not even. Zoo animal health staff, FWC professionals with two decades of manatee experience, and Sea to Shore Alliance staff were concerned.

The physical exam of the very large manatee revealed he had recently been losing weight and that he had suffered an incredible amount of damage to his tail in the past. Determining the age of manatees is difficult and inexact, but it was clear this male had seen many years.

The last seven weeks have included frequent exams by the Zoo animal health department including routine blood work, ultrasounds, and medical treatments as needed. The Manatee Critical Care Center's dedicated keepers have put in countless hours of observation and have closely monitored the amount he would eat.

Unfortunately, he is not showing the improvement that Zoo staff hoped to see. Nicknamed Miller, for the creek he was recued from, the geriatric manatee still has a tough fight ahead of him. Zoo veterinarians are consulting with specialists and are continuing aggressive treatment and supportive care.

"It's a great day when we can send a healthy animal back to the wild," said Tony Vecchio, Executive Director of Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens. "Miller, on the other hand, is a different story. We all knew when we invested in the Critical Care Center that there would be highs and lows and that some animals would come to us with greater challenges than others. All we can do is give each manatee the best care possible and hope that's enough to give them a fighting chance to get back to the wild."

[Dropbox link for stills and video](#)

PUBLIC AND MEDIA are invited to the release of Vilanzo on Tuesday, May 15, at 9:30 at:

**Oak Harbor Boat Ramp  
2428 Seaway St.  
Jacksonville, FL 32233**

MEDIA is invited to the load up at the Zoo at 8:30 – please contact JJ Vitale if you would like to attend.

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#### **About Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens**

For over 100 years, the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens has aimed to inspire the discovery and appreciation of wildlife through innovative experiences in a caring environment. Starting in 1914 with an animal collection of one red deer fawn, the Zoo now has more than 2,000 rare and exotic animals and 1,000 species of plants, boasting the largest botanical garden in Northeast Florida. **The Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens is a nonprofit organization and a portion of every ticket sold goes to the over 45 conservation initiatives Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens supports around the world, and here in NE Florida.** JZG is proud to be an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. For more information, visit [jacksonvillezoo.org](http://jacksonvillezoo.org).