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Beautiful, Bright-Orange Orchid Declared Endangered in Florida

November 13, 2017-- Jacksonville, FL – The beautiful, bright-orange Chapman's fringed orchid (*Platanthera chapmanii*) was declared endangered in the Florida Regulated Plant Index in late October this year in large part because of the tireless advocating from Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens' Horticulturist, Houston Snead.

A unique orchid species that was once found in sunny wet savannas, wet pine flatwoods, and hillside seeps, the Chapman's fringed orchid is now limited to a few, sparse populations in north Florida, southeast Georgia and one small population in eastern Texas. It shares habitat with other species of orchids, carnivorous plants, and many other native wildflowers.

Championed by Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens' (JZG) Horticulturist, Houston Snead and Environmental Specialist, Lisa Hassell from the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) Division of Plant Industry, the recommendation to be listed as an endangered species was approved by the Endangered Plant Advisory Council of Florida on Friday, October 27th.

"I'm grateful that the Endangered Plant Advisory Council has decided to list *Platanthera chapmanii*," said Snead. "Whereas the flower had no legal protection before, its new endangered status provides protection against poaching, and will help the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens conserve this species across its range."

JZG Horticulture staff use predictive maps to search for new populations of Chapman's fringed orchid. Protecting these endangered orchids is important not only to prevent their extinction, but because they are good indicators of the health of the ecosystem. By helping to manage a habitat for Chapman's fringed orchids, the Zoo also maintains the habitat of many other rare native plants. Once new populations are discovered, staff meet with landowners to develop a management strategy that will allow these rare plants to grow, flower, and reproduce. Under FDACS approved permit, some seed is also collected for seed banking and propagation, methods used to protect species long term.

According to Lisa Hassell, "This species is hanging on by a thread, and the conservation efforts JZG is making will be a big part of safeguarding the survival of this beautiful terrestrial orchid. The mission of the Division of Plant Industry, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, is to protect Florida's native and commercially grown plants. Partnering with JZG in this effort is literally helping to fulfill and guard Florida's namesake which means "full of flowers."

Photos by Houston Snead

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.