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## **ZOO EXCITED TO DEBUT NEW BLACK BEAR**

### **Friday, October 21, 2016**

October 20, 2016 – *Jacksonville, FL* – Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens (JZG) is excited to debut Betsy, a three-and-a-half-year-old North American black bear, at the newly renovated black bear enclosure in the Wild Florida section of the Zoo. She came to us from the Wildlife Center of Virginia (WCV), because she was unable to be released back into the wild.

Our upgraded black bear habitat has almost doubled its previous size and includes a new holding yard and five-foot-deep pool. The Zoo's horticultural team has also added six new plant species, all native to Florida, including the American Beautyberry, which Betsy has already been seen eating the berries. All the new plants provide fruit appropriate for bears, while also providing, shelter, shade and enrichment; they are all low maintenance and provide an excellent habitat for wildlife.

Adjacent to one another the panther and black bear enclosures are now outfitted with a new set of gates and chutes to permit both species to alternate between each other's habitat. A new interpretive deck area has also been installed to give guests the opportunity to view bear and panther future training sessions.

Betsy is an energetic, young bear who enjoys splashing around in her new pool. Her playful disposition delighted the fans of the WCV's live feed camera and is sure to charm guests here at the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens.

Many of the species in the Wild Florida section of the Zoo can serve as role models for our Living Well With Wildlife, positive human/animal interaction theme. This is especially important in Florida due to the state's large human population and its abundant number of animal species. The Zoo's previous North American black bear, Billy, helped test bear-resistant latches on garbage cans to help address and minimize human/animal conflict.

Betsy was born in Virginia and presumably orphaned as a cub when she was found and taken in by a human family. She was eventually taken to live at the

Wildlife Center of Virginia who later tried to return her to her natural habitat. Betsy, however, sought out human companionship at the Madison Dollar General Store. She was then returned to the WCV in hopes of weening her from her desire to be around humans. This was not the case, and in April 2014, it was determined that she could not be released back into the wild. Luckily this lovable mammal was sent to the JZG.

“Our staff is really happy to see how well Betsy is settling in,” says Craig Miller, Curator of Mammals. “She’s going to be a great ambassador for American black bears, and really all wildlife, to help us get the word out about how important it is that we all take steps to coexist peacefully with wild animals. This includes properly securing garbage in bear country.”

Betsy’s story and Billy’s training show how important education to the public is for the future of wild life. The Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens hopes to continue to educate humans in the best practices for living with native animals in the wild.

Betsy will be viewable by our guests for limited hours, from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m., beginning Friday, October 21<sup>st</sup>.

Photo Credit: Brittney Hendricks <http://bit.ly/2elkWRr>

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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).