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Contact: JJ Vitale ▪ 904.757.4463, ext. 145 ▪ cell: 904-635-5035 ▪ [vitalej@jacksonvillezoo.org](mailto:vitalej@jacksonvillezoo.org)  
Janet Wesley ▪ 904.757.4463, ext. 210 ▪ cell: 904-472-3699 ▪ [wesleyj@jacksonvillezoo.org](mailto:wesleyj@jacksonvillezoo.org)

## **Zoo Celebrates Opening of Manatee Critical Care Center with Festival and Ribbon Cutting**

February 17, 2017-- *Jacksonville, FL* – Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens (JZG) is proud to announce the opening of their Manatee Critical Care Center, which will house and rehabilitate injured local animals for release into the wild.

To celebrate the opening of this important local resource, the Zoo will be hosting a ribbon cutting ceremony during the annual Jacksonville Manatee Festival on Saturday, February 18. The day kicks off at 9:45 a.m. with a celebration parade, followed by a ribbon cutting ceremony at 10 a.m. From 11 a.m. – 1 p.m., guests will be able to access the perimeter of the facility from the Zoo's Wild Florida loop. The festival continues until 2 p.m. with face painting and live music from Sciatica Beach. Festival partners include Jacksonville University, Save the Manatee Club, St. Johns Riverkeeper and more.

The Zoo's Marine Mammal Response Team has long held a partnership with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to rescue local injured and cold-stunned manatees and transport them to rehabilitation facilities where they are treated and released. With the high number of manatees in the Jacksonville area and the cost and risks associated with moving these animals, JZG's Manatee Critical Care Center will be a vital asset, allowing this team to go beyond the rescue and further contribute to the preservation of this incredible species. The Center will be run entirely by JZG staff and once the animals, who are often recovering from boat strikes or cold weather illness, are rehabilitated, they'll be released back into our local waters. JZG's animal care staff expresses that they are "excited for the Manatee Critical Care Center to open here at the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens. This Center will help us recover the status of the endangered Florida Manatee. Our goal is to eventually remove the manatee from the Endangered Species List by providing the best medical care ensuring successful releases of manatees back into their natural environments."

The Manatee Critical Care Center will be viewable to the public from inside the Zoo, unless in the instance that a manatee needs solitude for rehabilitation purposes. The manatees' length of stay at the Center will be determined on a case by case basis, depending on severity of illness or injury. For more information on the Jacksonville Manatee Festival, visit [jacksonvillezoo.org/manateefestival](http://jacksonvillezoo.org/manateefestival).

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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).