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Zoo to Rehabilitate First Manatees at Nation's Newest Manatee Critical Care Center!

August 29, 2017 – *Jacksonville, FL* –America's newest Manatee Critical Care Center, housed at the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens, will be receiving two young sea cows from SeaWorld Orlando on Wednesday, August 30. Both manatees require a little more time in human care before Florida Fish & Wildlife deems them ready for release later this year.

Cassie and Buckeye, orphaned in August and September of 2015 respectively, are the Zoo's Manatee Critical Care Center's inaugural manatees! Female Cassie and male Buckeye were both rescued by members of FWC and Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens' Marine Mammal Response Team. Both were transported to SeaWorld Orlando where they received round-the-clock care and bottle feeding. Cassie weighed only 66 pounds at time of rescue. Now at 775 pounds, Cassie is thriving! Buckeye was a mere 63 pounds when he was rescued, and now weighs 625 pounds. Fully grown, they can reach nearly a ton.

These two manatees will remain at Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens' Manatee Critical Care Center, under the watchful eye of the Zoo's Animal Health specialists, for critical weight gain and continued monitoring until they are determined to be ready to be released.

The Zoo's Manatee Critical Care Center was completed earlier this year. The center features two large tanks, one outfitted with a lift-floor for safer, more effective medical treatment, and the other has a window for guest viewing.

According to Craig Miller, the Zoo's Curator of Mammals, who also serves as Chair of the Manatee Rescue and Rehabilitation Partnership, and leader of the Zoo's Marine Mammal Response Team, "Welcoming Cassie and Buckeye to our center is a huge, exciting milestone in Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens' history of manatee conservation. Our Critical Care Center reaffirms in our commitment to manatees, giving us the capability to rescue, rehabilitate and return manatees to the wild."

Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens' Manatee Critical Care Center is one of only four such facilities. The other centers are located in Orlando, Tampa and Miami. Having one locally means that animals rescued in north Florida, Georgia, and even South Carolina waters can receive quicker care, recover faster and be returned to their home waters without incurring excessive transport time.

Though recently downlisted from Endangered to Threatened status, manatees are still federally protected and relatively rare. They face constant dangers from boat strikes, drowning from entanglement, illness from pollution, and cold stress.

Transfer to the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens is scheduled to take place around 11 a.m. on Wednesday, August 30. Guests will be able to view activity along the Wild Florida Loop.

Media

For a behind-the-scenes invitation to the manatees' arrival, please contact JJ Vitale vitalej@jacksonvillezoo.org 904.635.5035

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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.