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## **Zoo Mourns Passing of Beloved American Black Bear Billy**

May 6, 2016-- Jacksonville, FL – Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens (JZG) family is greatly saddened to announce the passing of Black bear Billy. Zoo veterinary staff made the difficult decision to euthanize Billy when an exploratory surgery showed an aggressive and advanced intestinal mass.

Keepers and behavioral observation volunteers noticed Billy's decreased appetite and activity in late April. On April 27<sup>th</sup>, a health exam was performed to evaluate his condition and an ultrasound revealed a large mass in his abdomen. During an exploratory surgery with a consulting surgeon, an invasive, potentially neoplastic tumor was found. Due to the poor prognosis associated with the findings, the decision was made to euthanize him.

Billy was 22 years-old and lived at the Zoo since he arrived with his mother in 2000. Always popular with guests and staff, Billy participated in an extensive training and conditioning program for medical and husbandry procedures. He was regarded as an easy-going bear by his keepers. He easily learned new behaviors and was quick to respond to his care-givers for a treat of crickets or frozen grapes.

An American black bear from a zoo in Washington State, he was significantly larger than the smaller subspecies of black bears found in Florida. Billy used his size and strength in a unique fashion at the Zoo. He recently served as the official tester of the bear-proof latch for Toter and other large garbage bins. If Billy couldn't get in it, you knew it was safe from the bears in the wild! This testing is helping to reduce incidents of human/bear conflict.

"Billy was a favorite JZG resident of both staff and guests alike. It is never easy to lose an animal, but knowing Billy lived a long and fulfilled life in our care brings some comfort," said Tracy Fenn, Supervisor of Mammals.

We will miss Billy, and plan to honor his memory by completing the extensive exhibit renovations already underway in time for the arrival of another zoo or rescue bear needing to be relocated to a care facility.

JZG is significantly expanding the bear habitat, enlarging and improving holding areas, providing a bigger pool and enabling the bear and panther enclosures to accommodate either species so animals can temporarily swap spaces, for extra

stimulation and enrichment. The renovations are due to be completed in the next few months.

**Photo Credits:** Lynde Nunn, Mark Sheppe, Yaira Osborne

**Link to Dropbox file:** Billy testing garbage bins <http://bit.ly/24xDXEK>

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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 an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. For more information, visit [jacksonvillezoo.org](http://jacksonvillezoo.org).