



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Brevard Zoo to Start Adding Seagrass Back to Indian River Lagoon through Nursery in conjunction with Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute**

MELBOURNE, Fla., February 1, 2023 — Brevard Zoo's Restore Our Shores (ROS) team is adding another conservation initiative to its lineup of projects geared toward helping restore the Indian River Lagoon. In partnership with the Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute (HSWRI), the Zoo is building a seagrass nursery in Melbourne Beach.

Seagrass is the basis of a healthy lagoon ecosystem, so long-term, successful reestablishment of this critical resource will benefit the lagoon itself as well as the species that call it home like manatees. The seagrass grown at this nursery will be used in ROS restoration projects throughout the lagoon.

"As restoration efforts continue within the lagoon, the need to increase available seagrass stock for restoration is necessary," said Ashley Rearden, the Zoo's Conservation Curator. "We want to ensure that we can meet the need of providing this valuable resource."

The Zoo has partnered with several organizations as well as two seagrass experts to learn more about growing seagrass.

"We are proud to kick off this new partnership with the Brevard Zoo to improve understanding and restoration of the lagoon's seagrasses," said Dr. Jeff Eble, HSWRI's Florida Program Director. "Seagrasses are an essential part of the lagoon ecosystem, providing important habitat and food for many species, including popular sportfish and manatees, and they help maintain good water and sediment quality by consuming excess nutrients and oxygenating the water."

On January 20, dozens of volunteers met at the site, ready to begin construction of the stands our seagrass tanks will rest on. Construction of the nursery was funded by the Indian River Lagoon's National Estuary Program (IRLNEP), with generous support from community members covering additional costs.

The nursery plans include six 880-gallon raceways, or systems of four tanks, as well as six individual tanks with their own pumps for testing best practices. Construction is currently in the design and permitting phase, and equipment has been ordered, according to Rearden. Other components include electrical and plumbing, installation of equipment, pumps and tanks, sand installation, water quality sampling and maintenance, and then, finally, the addition of seagrass.

Initially, Restore Our Shores will be working with *Halodule wrightii*, or shoal grass, but they plan to expand to other seagrass species at future nurseries. Nursery construction should be completed by the end of March. Once planted, the seagrass will take several months to grow.

While the seagrass nursery will be overseen by a staff member, regular trained volunteers will be able to sign up for daily shifts to assist in day-to-day care of seagrass.

Please visit [this Dropbox link](#) to see photos of construction of the nursery.

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*Brevard Zoo is home to more than 900 animals representing 195 species from all over the world. As a not-for-profit organization, it is a leader in the fields of animal wellness, education and conservation. More information is available at [www.brevardzoo.org](http://www.brevardzoo.org).*

HSWRI ([www.hswri.org](http://www.hswri.org)) is a not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) research organization founded in 1963 "to return to the sea some measure of the benefits derived from it." Its areas of inquiry are ecology, physiology, bioacoustics and aquaculture. Based in San Diego with facilities in Orlando, FL and Carlsbad, CA, HSWRI's unique contributions are due in part to access to SeaWorld's extensive marine zoological collection, a close association with local universities and highly respected scientific staff.

*Treetop Trek features five aerial obstacle courses that whisk guests above parts of the Zoo and through lush Florida landscapes. More information is available at [www.treetoptrek.com](http://www.treetoptrek.com).*