

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Brevard Zoo Starting Experimental Seagrass Planting Project**

MELBOURNE, Fla., May 23, 2023 — Brevard Zoo’s Restore Our Shores (ROS) conservation program has started a new experimental project to learn more about where larger seagrass restoration efforts would thrive in the Indian River Lagoon. After just a few weeks of planting and monitoring small seagrass beds, our ROS team has already found seagrass growing at many of the initial sites.

Our ROS team, along with partners St. Johns River Water Management District and the Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Programs (IRL NEP), are planting 24 seagrass beds in 17 locations in the lagoon and will monitor the sites over the next year. This pilot program is being funded by community members.

About 215 total square feet of seagrass was planted at each bed. While ROS continues to build a [seagrass nursery funded by IRL NEP](#), the team used shoal grass purchased from the Florida Oceanographic Society for this current monitoring project. This type of seagrass is known as a “pioneer species,” meaning it’s not as picky about light or salinity like some other species.

After carefully outlining the areas for the beds, our ROS team of staff and volunteers inspected the sites to note algae, other seagrasses and other potential factors present that may affect the new seagrass beds. The seagrass plants were gently wrapped onto floral wire, a material that should degrade over time, which is used to better anchor the plant in the water. The roots were then methodically planted into the lagoon floor at certain distances from each other. Exclusion devices were placed at certain areas of the bed to test their effectiveness.

“This is going to tell us more about where to or where not to do seagrass restoration in the lagoon’s current water quality conditions– and what methodologies we should explore,” said Olivia Escandell, ROS conservation manager.

When monitoring these beds in the future, our ROS team will take note of how the planted seagrasses are faring, what other seagrasses or algae have grown in the bed, and more. In

a year's time, the results of this initial project should help identify the best locations for bigger seagrass beds to be planted.

The Indian River Lagoon is a seagrass-based ecosystem. Seagrass meadows used to be prolific in the lagoon, offering a habitat and food source to several inhabitants. Seagrasses also anchor the seafloor and slow waves, protecting the shoreline. Algae superblooms brought on by nutrient pollutants in wastewater and stormwater blocked the sunlight to these meadows, killing off acres of seagrass – some nearly completely.

"You can't grow a plant in a closet," Olivia said.

Our ROS team continues to replenish healthy populations of oysters, clams and mangroves in an effort to reestablish organisms crucial to a balanced lagoon ecosystem. Still, more work is needed to continue helping the Indian River Lagoon.

"We're not going to plant ourselves out of this problem, but we hope to accelerate restoration," Olivia said. "There's a lot of other work that needs to happen to reduce nutrients making their way into the lagoon."

For photos or video of initial plantings, [please visit this Dropbox link](#).

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### **About Brevard Zoo**

*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).*

*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).*