

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Congressman Haridopolos, East Coast Zoological Foundation announce \$1.75 million investment in sea turtle rehabilitation at Bowen Aquarium

MELBOURNE, Fla., February 18, 2026 — In a joint announcement this afternoon, Congressman Mike Haridopolos and Keith Winsten, Chief Executive Officer of East Coast Zoological Foundation, the parent organization of Brevard Zoo, announced that \$1.75 million was secured from fiscal year 2026 Commerce, Justice, Science (CJS) appropriations to benefit the Scaife Family Sea Turtle Care Complex at Bowen Aquarium.

“Florida’s Space Coast is home to some of the most important marine ecosystems in the country,” said Congressman Mike Haridopolos. “This \$1.75 million investment will strengthen sea turtle rehabilitation efforts, expand critical research, and ensure that injured and sick turtles receive the specialized care they need. I’m proud to support the outstanding conservation work being done at Brevard Zoo and to deliver federal resources that protect our coastal environment for future generations.”

The funding will be awarded to the Foundation to build a second rehabilitation center at Bowen Aquarium in Port Canaveral. The 12,873-square-foot facility will include 10,000 square feet of indoor exhibition, rehabilitation and veterinary space dedicated to the lifesaving care of stranded, washback, sick and injured sea turtles. The Center will provide both short-term rehabilitative care and long-term sanctuary before turtles are released back into the water, while also engaging and inspiring the community in marine conservation efforts.

For more than 10 years, the Foundation has been caring for hundreds of sick and injured sea turtles at the Sea Turtle Rehabilitation Center at Brevard Zoo. In the past two years, the Center has treated an average of 131 sea turtles, a 157% increase from previous years. The surge is a result of the growing number of turtles suffering from fibropapillomatosis (FP), a complex and costly-to-treat virus that many sea turtle facilities in Florida are unable to

manage. The Center at Brevard Zoo operates one of only seven facilities in Florida that can treat sea turtles suffering from this virus.

"We couldn't have asked for a better champion than Representative Haridopolos to tell the story of sea turtle rescue and rehabilitation on Florida's east coast. We are celebrating the shared advocacy that brought about this significant step forward, while also noting that more is needed to meet the demands the sea turtles are facing," said Winsten.

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About East Coast Zoological Foundation

Driven by a mission to answer the call, East Coast Zoological Foundation (ECZF) is focused on educating, engaging and empowering the community to take action for conservation. The 501c(3) nonprofit located in Melbourne, Fla., includes Brevard Zoo and Bowen Aquarium campuses. ECZF works directly with Florida species and the community to develop programs and workshops to make a difference locally and around the world. From sea turtle rehabilitations and releases, building living shorelines along the Indian River Lagoon, providing scholarships and grants to the community and more, the Foundation creates opportunities for guests to connect with nature and make an impact in conservation and education. Founded in 1986, ECZF is governed by a volunteer board of directors and receives no recurring operating funds from any city, county or state government, relying on donations from people and companies to continue answering the call for wildlife and the environment along Florida's Space Coast and beyond. To learn more, visit OurLegacyCampaign.org.