

News Release

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For Immediate Release

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Naples Zoo Earns National Standing

Naples, FL — Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens is proud to announce that accreditation was granted by the prestigious Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) this week. Every AZA facility goes through the rigorous inspection process every five years in hopes of being accredited and with it the honor and responsibility of caring for some of the planet's most extraordinary creatures. Of the more than 2,800 USDA licensed facilities in North America, only 210 have received this high status. While Naples Zoo first earned accreditation in 2001, there is no guarantee the credential will be renewed during subsequent inspections.

As the only accredited facility in Southwest Florida, Naples Zoo will be able to continue offering area residents and visitors a diverse collection of rare animals and the understanding that their zoo visit helps in the worldwide effort for long-term species survival. Larry Richardson, President of the Naples Zoo Board of Directors, explains why an accredited zoo is important to the area. "The Southwest Florida community can be proud that Naples Zoo continues to meet the ever increasing professional standards set forth by the AZA – especially at a time when other institutions that were accredited long before Naples Zoo are not maintaining that accreditation. AZA accreditation insures guests that they while they enjoy their visit, Naples Zoo is also providing quality care for their animals and participating in worldwide conservation."

The application process alone for AZA accreditation takes about a year. It culminated in late summer 2005 when Naples Zoo staff submitted the four-inch-thick notebooks containing the accreditation application and supporting documentation. But as staff prepared for the multiple day visit by the on-site Accreditation Inspection Team, a record setting hurricane was bearing down on Southwest Florida. Wilma's impact littered the Zoo's natural paths with tree limbs and flattened two exhibits. A supportive AZA staff offered to delay the accreditation process, but after succeeding in recovery and re-opening the Zoo weeks ahead of initial estimates, Naples Zoo staff made the decision to proceed with the inspection process as scheduled. Following additional preparation work by an exceptional Zoo staff and generous community volunteers, Naples Zoo welcomed the AZA inspectors in late January.

During the three day inspection, all aspects of Naples Zoo were reviewed — from animal care to educational programs and from financial stability to visitor services. Accreditation inspection team members have significant experience in operations, animal management, and animal health from other AZA accredited zoos. The three person inspection team —including a zoo director, zoo veterinarian, and director of animal programs – looked carefully at all aspects of Naples Zoo, including the fact that the facility recently transitioned to a non-profit organization.

Following the inspection, the team prepared a written report for the Accreditation Commission. Zoo Director David Tetzlaff and two other zoo staff then sat before the 18 member commission during the AZA's Regional Conference held this week in Jacksonville, Florida. At the conclusion of the hearing, all were thrilled to hear the congratulations following the good news that Naples Zoo had again been accredited.

"We are very pleased to grant accreditation to the Naples Zoo," stated Kristen L. Vehrs, Interim Executive Director of the AZA. "Zoos and aquariums in North America are continually evolving and reaffirming their commitment to animal care, professionalism, ethics, conservation, and education. In turn they are enriching the lives of their community. Naples Zoo is no exception."

Tetzlaff explains, "We are all proud the Zoo has been accredited again by AZA. When I look back over the past year and the challenges Naples Zoo has faced – from the land acquisition deal to the hurricane – it is a strong statement that Naples Zoo again met the rising standards set by AZA. This stamp of approval from the best professionals in the field is high praise indeed."

Naples Zoo is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization located at 1590 Goodlette-Frank Road across from the Coastland Center mall in the heart of Naples. In addition to innovative presentations like Serpents: Fangs & Fiction and Planet Predator, the Zoo offers a historic botanical garden and many rare animals. Guests board the Primate Expedition Cruise to glide by islands inhabited by monkeys, lemurs, and apes living in natural habitats. Admission (\$15.95 adult/ \$9.95 children) includes all shows and the boat ride. Visitors can also pick up a healthy lunch and snacks at the SUBWAY® Cafe and shop for wild gifts at tame prices in The ZOO Gift Shop. The Zoo welcomes guests daily from 9:30 to 5:30 with the last ticket sold at 4:30. To learn more, click www.napleszoo.com or call (239) 262-5409.

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