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SEA & SHORELINE CREATES SOLUTION TO FEED SEAGRASS TO STARVING MANATEES

Using excess seagrass from its largest aquatic restoration project in Crystal River, Fla., the company begins delivery of seagrass to feed manatees that are being rehabilitated at the Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park

WINTER GARDEN, FLA., December 8, 2021 / PRNewswire/ -- In response to the grim milestone of over 1,000 manatees perishing in Florida, many due to starvation caused by their main food source (seagrass) disappearing, Sea & Shoreline, a leader in rehabilitating threatened aquatic ecosystems, is taking action. The company announced today that they have created a solution that will supply thousands of pounds of seagrass to feed manatees that are being rehabilitated at the Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park in Homosassa, Florida.

Much like trees shed their leaves in the fall and winter, so does seagrass. The seagrass, which can lose (and regrow) up to 80 percent of its biomass annually, floats to the top of the water. As an initiative of its "Seagrass Saves Sea Life" crusade, Sea & Shoreline will collect this seagrass and transport it to the state park weekly to feed captive manatees in the park's care.

Manatees are herbivores and typically eat 10-15 percent of their body weight in seagrass daily (approximately 80-150 pounds). The park provides four daily feedings of two types of lettuce (romaine and escarole) to resident and rehabilitation manatees in the park's care. It is estimated that seagrass has significantly more calories and nutrients than lettuce.

According to Carter Henne, biologist and president of Sea & Shoreline, "This is a win/win for everyone. Our seagrass collection efforts will help feed the rescued manatees and transition them better into the wild where they will need to forage for seagrass; it will help offset the park's costly lettuce budget which is expected to climb as they rehabilitate more manatees; and it removes floating seagrass from our local waterways where it could sink and compromise areas where Sea & Shoreline has successfully restored seagrass meadows."

Sea & Shoreline will harvest the seagrass from its largest seagrass restoration project in Crystal River, Florida. "There, we have an abundance of over 200 acres of lush, restored seagrass where manatees are feasting, unlike unrestored areas of Florida where they are starving," says Henne.

Sea & Shoreline has been contracted by two non-profits, Save Crystal River and the Homosassa River Restoration Project, to restore seagrass in both rivers. The two rivers are connected to each other through the Gulf of Mexico which eliminates concerns of transferring seagrass from one water body to another.

The provisional feeding project is being initially funded through a grant from the California-based Nancy P. and Richard K. Robbins Foundation. “We see this as a necessary, immediate step on the path toward a long-term goal of creating a sustainable food solution for Florida’s starving manatee population,” said Richard K. Robbins.

“We hope that by shining light on the plight of the manatee, more private and public donors will be moved, like us, to support feeding programs and also help restore vital seagrass meadows around the state’s coastline for all wildlife, especially the manatees, and provide a vital assist in our ongoing battle against climate change,” he added.

Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park currently has four manatees in its care (Betsy, Ariel, Hines, and Keeks), and expects to receive more as seagrass meadows continue to decline in Florida as harmful algal blooms contaminate waterways and block sunlight needed to grow healthy submerged aquatic vegetation. Seagrass provides critical ecosystem services including:

- water filtration and nutrient cycling to clean water bodies
- provision of food, habitat, and protection for manatees, fish, turtles, and other sea life
- sediment stabilization to provide resilient coastlines and storm protection, and
- carbon sequestration to address climate change. Seagrass can store up to 35 times more carbon than a terrestrial rainforest for millenia

Sea & Shoreline has proven success in rehabilitating aquatic ecosystems in places such as Crystal River, Homosassa River, Lake Istokpoga, Caloosahatchee River, and St. Andrew Bay, and has successful demonstration projects in the Indian River Lagoon (Banana River and Fort Pierce Inlet State Park).

Earlier this year, the company celebrated a milestone by planting its one-millionth seagrass plant and launching its newest crusade, “Seagrass Saves Sea Life,” to raise awareness and educate consumers and legislators about the critical environmental and ecological benefits of seagrass. With the tragic increase in manatee deaths in Florida this year, the company is working closely with state agencies, water management districts, non-profits, and other stakeholders to reverse this crisis, and to help marine life survive by reducing nutrient overloads, removing muck, and planting seagrass to restore aquatic habitats.

ABOUT SEA & SHORELINE

Sea & Shoreline, LLC is a Florida-based aquatic restoration firm that restores fresh and saltwater habitats to healthy and self-sustaining ecosystems. Services include seagrass, oyster reef, coral reef, and propeller scar restorations, dredging, living shorelines, artificial reefs, vegetated retaining walls, wetland plantings, berm and bank stabilizations, and seagrass mitigation banking. For more information, please visit seaandshoreline.com, or follow us on social media [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [YouTube](#).

ABOUT HOMOSASSA SPRINGS WILDLIFE STATE PARK

As part of Florida State Parks, Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park provides resource-based recreation while preserving, interpreting, and restoring natural and cultural resources. The park’s distinctive feature, the first magnitude Homosassa Spring, enables the park to serve as a rehabilitation partner in the Manatee Rescue and Rehabilitation Partnership. This partnership is a cooperative of agencies, organizations, and oceanaria that rescue, rehabilitate, release, and monitor Florida manatees. Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park receives rescued and rehabilitated manatees from partner facilities and park rangers care for them until they are released back into the wild.

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