

DISNEY RETURNS TWO REHABILITATED MANATEES INTO THE WILD AT BLUE SPRINGS STATE PARK

February 18, 2003, Lake Buena Vista, Fla. -- Marine mammal experts from The Living Seas at the Walt Disney World Resort returned two manatees to the wild today. They were released in the warm waters of the St. John's River at Blue Springs State Park near Orange City.

The two manatees, nicknamed Pine and Forest by schoolchildren, were rescued in January 2002 after suffering from cold stress and what appeared to be frostbite, in the Ortega River near Jacksonville, Florida. Both manatees are between 3 and 4 years old. Their rescue and subsequent care are part of a manatee rehabilitation program governed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Pine and Forest arrived at Epcot's Living Seas facility at the Walt Disney World Resort in July 2002 for the final round of their rehabilitation. The goal was to ensure they gained weight and became healthy enough to return to the wild. The manatees are being outfitted with special tracking devices, so the progress of Pine and Forest as they re-adapt to the wild will be monitored. The public can monitor their progress by visiting www.wildtracks.org.

While the care associated with the manatees' rehabilitation at The Living Seas were provided by Walt Disney World Co.; Guests at The Living Seas have also helped other manatees in the wild by supporting the company-matched Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund (DWCF). The DWCF has contributed more than \$250,000 for manatee research and awareness around the globe. Over the past five years the DWCF has supported manatee research in Belize with the Wildlife Trust, and worked with the Save the Manatee Club to fund manatee public-awareness waterway signs, educational brochures and boat decals. The Fund has also supported the production of teacher education guides for several Caribbean countries where manatees are endangered.

The Manatee Rehabilitation Partnership (MRP) sponsors the monitoring of these creatures in conjunction with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The USFWS oversees the manatee recovery program in which The Living Seas* has been involved since 1988. The Manatee Rehabilitation Partnership (MRP) is a cooperative group of nonprofit, private, state, and federal entities with the goal of monitoring the health and survival of rehabilitated and released manatees. More information is available at www.wildlifetrust.org.

**The Living Seas located at Epcot within Walt Disney World Resort is the world's largest saltwater aquarium. Within the tank is a complete coral reef inhabited by more than 4,000 sea creatures including sharks, tropical fish, dolphin and rays.*