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NOAA FINDS PERMANENT HOME FOR NEW JERSEY GRAY SEAL

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries Service) today announced that a female gray seal that stranded in New Jersey last April will be heading west. The Indianapolis Zoo will welcome the seal in September, adding her to their permanent marine mammal collection.

"The Indianapolis Zoo has graciously agreed to provide the seal a home and has the appropriate facilities to provide the care and attention that this animal will need," said Dr. Janet Whaley, the national marine mammal stranding coordinator for NOAA.

The seal stranded on April 16 and was rehabilitated at the Marine Mammal Stranding Center (MMSC) in Brigantine, New Jersey. Although the seal's health has improved, it has permanent weakness and partial immobility of its hind limbs, disabilities that decrease her chances of surviving long-term in the wild. Animals that are unlikely to survive a return to the wild are classified as non-releasable by NOAA Fisheries Service.

The Indianapolis Zoo currently has four California sea lions, three harbor seals and one grey seal in its collection. "It is very satisfying to be able to partner with officials at NMFS on an issue like this where the animal wins and all of our goals are furthered," commented Dave Merritt, the Zoo's vice president and general curator.

The MMSC and other stranding response organizations work under NOAA Fisheries Service authorities. The agency works with aquaria and zoological parks nationwide to find permanent homes for non-releasable marine mammals, placing 79 such animals since 2000. The potential receiving facilities are evaluated to ensure they have room to accommodate the animal, that they comply with federal and state laws for holding animals in public display, and that staff have the skills for handling the particular species and animal.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

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NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

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On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries Service: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/health>