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The Paul A. & Veronica H. Gross  
**WILDLIFE CENTER**  
**OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA**  
Educate Rescue Rehabilitate Release

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## **PRESS RELEASE: WILDLIFE CENTER OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA FINDS AMBASSADOR PLACEMENT FOR BALD EAGLE WITH SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL ZOO**

The bald eagle has held an important place with spiritual symbolism for the native people of this land. They are honored as a symbol of honesty, truth, majesty, strength, courage, wisdom, power, and freedom. It is that powerful symbolism at the root of the bald eagle being placed on the Great Seal of the United States and becoming our country's national bird since 1792.

The Paul A. and Veronica H. Gross Wildlife Center of Southwest Florida, located on North Jackson Road in Venice, Florida, became a temporary home to a badly injured bald eagle last year. This beautiful bald eagle came to the wildlife center suffering two humeral fractures after an apparent fall. She underwent two major surgeries, and with a lot of hard work from the wildlife center's veterinarians, they were able to repair and save her wing. However, even after extensive physical therapy, and many attempts to rehabilitate, sadly, she had lost her ability to fly.



"It is our mission" says Pam Defouw, Executive Director of Southwest Florida Wildlife Center "to rescue, rehabilitate, and release. So, when we are unable to do so, we make sure they are placed in a facility that will assure their health and wellbeing."

The Wildlife Center of Southwest Florida is a non-profit facility that relies on funding from donations generously donated by the communities they serve. Housing, feeding, and caring for the large bird of prey proved costly over time. After discovering that the eagle was no longer able to fly, the wildlife center underwent extraordinary measures, dedicating the time and energy to find a suitable new home for the bald eagle.

*"We underwent extensive measures to repair this amazing bird. However, once learning she could not fly, we decided to look for a home where she could be an educational animal ambassador." Pam Defouw, Executive Director of WCSWFL*

The Wildlife Center of Southwest Florida is known as a top-notch rehabilitation and release facility for sick, injured, and orphaned wild animals in Southwest Florida. Southwest Florida's natural spaces and its ecosystem, like most of the United States, are dependent on all wild animals. Every wild animal has a place in the checks and balances within our ecosystem. Obviously, a bald eagle brings more awareness to the center and the plight of injured wildlife, but the Wildlife Center of Southwest Florida is focused on all the region's wildlife. This beautiful eagle is one of thousands of animal emergencies the center sees on a day-to-day basis.

While rehabilitating their rescues for release back into their natural habitat is at the core of their mission, the wildlife center is also extremely invested in utilizing their connections within the wildlife rehabbers network to re-home those that are not able to be released back into the wild, and for this bald eagle, that new home is now the *Smithsonian National Zoo*.

In a fateful turn of events, *The Smithsonian*, located in Washington, D.C., was looking for an ambassador bald eagle for educational purposes. Since The Smithsonian & The Wildlife Center of Southwest Florida have similar standards for care, rehabilitation, and education, it was a perfect pairing for the two organizations.

Now that this majestic creature has found her new home, she has also been given a name. The Smithsonian National Zoo staff has chosen the name Acadia. She is thriving in her new home. Acadia is settling in, thoroughly enjoying enrichment and the care given to her by animal keeper Ashley Graham and the staff at the SNZ. Her happiness is evident when you take one look at how her plumage has recovered since her rescue. Turning her very uncertain story into a joyful and happy one that will enlighten and educate people for years to come.

Article contribution by Meg Novak

## **Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)**

### **Conservation Status: Delisted – Not Endangered at time of this publication**

(<https://www.nwf.org/Educational-Resources/Wildlife-Guide/Birds/Bald-Eagle/> / <https://www.si.edu/newsdesk/factsheets/american-trail-animal-bios>)

> In 1973, the bald eagle was listed on the U.S. Endangered Species List due to population declines from pesticide use (including DDT), lead poisoning, hunting and habitat loss. A decade earlier it was estimated that only 417 pairs of eagles remained in the United States. The ban of DDT in many states have greatly helped the eagles recover.

> In 1995, bald eagle populations were healthy enough to merit a downgrade from “endangered” to “threatened” on the Endangered Species List.

> In 2007, they were officially delisted.

**For more information or if you would like to donate to help the Wildlife Center of Southwest Florida's mission, please go to: <https://wildlifeswfl.org/>**