



# NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Living Coast Discovery Center Unveils Plans for Turtle Lagoon Enhancement Project**

*The \$300,000 community-funded project will enrich the interactive learning experience, expand living space for endangered eastern Pacific green sea turtles at zoo/aquarium on San Diego Bay*

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**CHULA VISTA, CALIF. (JAN. 7, 2016)** – The [Living Coast Discovery Center](http://www.thelivingcoast.org) announced today that a major enhancement project is set to begin on its signature Turtle Lagoon exhibit, located at the entrance to the zoo and aquarium on San Diego Bay in Chula Vista. The project, valued at \$300,000, will provide the Living Coast's beloved animal ambassadors, endangered eastern Pacific green sea turtles, with additional space to swim freely, as well as offer more interactive elements to enhance the learning experience for visitors and students.

The Turtle Lagoon enhancement project was made possible by the generosity of a number of community supporters, including the T. Nelson Family, Greg Cox of the County of San Diego Board of Supervisors, The Orca Fund at The San Diego Foundation, Walton Family Foundation, Frank and Joan Roseman Family, Ken and Dina Weimer, the Hattie Ettinger Fund at The San Diego Foundation, Susan Fuller and Marine Group Boat Works.

To date, the Living Coast has raised over \$269,000, or 90 percent of its goal, from foundations, companies and individuals in the community for the Turtle Lagoon project. The organization is still looking for additional financial support to complete the initiative. To learn more about how to support the Living Coast and its sea turtle animal ambassadors, visit <http://www.thelivingcoast.org>.

The campaign to enhance the existing Turtle Lagoon exhibit was kicked off by a devoted supporter of the center, who first stepped forward with a significant donation in 2013, when a major funding shortfall threatened the Living Coast's future. Following the organization's successful financial turnaround and the implementation of a new strategic plan over the past two years, the Nelson family was looking for a way to make a meaningful, long-term impact at the Living Coast. The Turtle Lagoon enhancement project, which had been in a conceptual phase for some time, was identified as the ideal opportunity, and a fundraising campaign was launched to bring the project to fruition.

Construction begins this week, with completion scheduled for mid-March. The reopening will coincide with the grand opening of the Living Coast's new seasonal exhibit, *Passport to the Pacific—A Tour Around the World's Largest Ocean*.

During construction, the exhibit will be closed to visitors and the sea turtles will be temporarily relocated to an AZA-accredited facility, where they will be monitored by on-site veterinary staff in collaboration with the Living Coast's animal care team.

The enhancement project will increase the water volume of the pool from 4,000 gallons to 6,000 gallons, providing the sea turtles with more space to swim freely and accommodate their anticipated growth over the coming years. More interactive elements will also be added to the exhibit, including a turtle nest, a life-sized turtle, and “ways to help do your part” interpretive displays. This is the center’s first major capital improvement project in a decade. Turtle Lagoon was originally constructed in 2005 as part of a \$3 million renovation project at what was then known as the Chula Vista Nature Center.

“We are grateful for the tremendous community support for our beloved sea turtles,” said Executive Director Ben Vallejos. “If not for the guidance of our board of directors and generosity of the Nelson Family and other key members of the community, this would not be possible. The new Turtle Lagoon will significantly enhance the experience for guests of all ages at the Living Coast Discovery Center for many years to come.”

All sea turtles found in U.S. waters are currently listed as endangered or threatened by the Endangered Species Act. Eastern Pacific green sea turtles, the species featured in Turtle Lagoon, are the more common species found along our local coastline. The Living Coast is also home to a rescued loggerhead sea turtle that resides in the center’s Shark and Ray Experience, which came to the Living Coast in 2014 following its rehabilitation from injuries sustained by multiple boat strikes near the Florida Keys.

### **About the Living Coast Discovery Center**

*The Living Coast Discovery, a 501(c) 3 educational zoo and aquarium located within the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge on San Diego Bay, began operating as a non-profit in 2010 after assuming operations of the Chula Vista Nature Center. The Living Coast Discovery offers hands-on exhibits and up-close encounters with more than 350 plant and animal species native to Southern California coastal habitats, including endangered sea turtles, sting rays, leopard sharks, jellies, shorebirds, reptiles and a large collection of raptors such as hawks, falcons, owls, American bald eagle, golden eagle, and more. More information about the Living Coast Discovery Center is available at [www.thelivingcoast.org](http://www.thelivingcoast.org) or (619) 409-5900.*

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