

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **STINGRAY VISIT WILL BE A TOUCHING EXPERIENCE**

FRESNO, Calif. – The Fresno Chaffee Zoo will provide another opportunity for visitors to get in touch with nature when the seasonal exhibit, “Stingray Bay: A Touching Experience”, opens in March 2007.

The Fresno Chaffee Zoo is currently developing a master plan and strategic business plan for major capital improvements to the Zoo. The temporary Stingray Bay exhibit will provide a new and exciting hands-on experience to the community while permanent exhibits are planned, designed and constructed.

Visitors to Stingray Bay will be encouraged to touch the rays as the animals swim in a specially constructed 11,000 gallon saltwater pool. Visitors can also feed the stingrays by placing their hand under water and allowing the rays to take the food while gliding over the top. Zoo staff and volunteers will be present at the exhibit to enhance the learning experience about these gentle creatures which are often curious about people. These mild-tempered stingrays, whose barbs are clipped much like human fingernails, pose no threat to visitors.

Stingray Bay will house more than a dozen rays, most likely cownose stingrays (*Rhinoptera bonasus*) and a few larger Southern stingrays (*Dasyatis americana*). Although stingrays are found in waters off the coast of California, these species are found in the Atlantic Ocean.

“Stingray Bay: A Touching Experience” will open March 1 and run through Labor Day 2007. Admission to Stingray Bay is \$1 with regular Zoo admission. Fresno Chaffee Zoo members and children under 2 years of age are free. The stingrays can be fed for an additional \$1.

Similar stingray touch experiences, provided by San Diego based Living Exhibits Inc., have proven very popular and boosted attendance at zoos such as Phoenix Zoo, Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, and John Ball Zoo in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

#### **STINGRAY FACTS:**

- Stingrays, also called rays, are fish most closely related to sharks.
- A ray’s skeleton, like a shark’s, is made of cartilage rather than bone.
- The stingray’s eyes are on the top of their flattened bodies and the mouth, nostrils and gill slits are on the underbelly.
- There are about 470 species of rays in shallow coastal waters throughout the world and some freshwater rivers.
- Stingrays swim with a flying motion by undulating their body like a wave or by flapping their huge pectoral fins or “wings”.
- A ray’s wingspan, or disc-size, can range from about 12 inches (yellow stingrays) to over 20 feet (manta rays).
- Most rays eat crustaceans, clams, oysters, and some fish. Manta rays feed on plankton.
- Rays are generally inactive, staying partially buried in sand and camouflaged from predatory sharks and larger rays by their coloration.

- Rays are docile creatures; their stinger is used only for defense and consists of a razor-sharp, barbed or serrated cartilaginous spine which grows from the ray's whip-like tail similar to a fingernail.
- Some rays are viviparous, which means they bear their young live, while others lay eggs.
- Cownose rays are gregarious and make long migrations through the Atlantic Ocean.