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## **Audubon Louisiana Nature Center Reopens in Eastern New Orleans**

The sprawling, 86-acre site has undergone a \$10 million restoration that returns the center to its rightful place as a must-see destination for families throughout the region

(New Orleans, La.) – Everything old is truly new again at Audubon Louisiana Nature Center, the urban oasis for family recreation and environmental education for generations, that reopens in eastern New Orleans on Friday, October 6.

The sprawling, 86-acre site has undergone a \$10 million restoration that returns the center to its rightful place as a must-see destination for families throughout the region.

Back are many of the popular features that were built in the years following the Nature Center's 1980 opening, including a planetarium, an 8,500-square-foot Exhibit Pavilion, classrooms, interactive educational exhibits, a network of trails and boardwalks, restrooms, animal care space, extensive

“Audubon Nature Institute is thrilled to bring back this iconic attraction that has meant so much to so many,” said Ron Forman, Audubon Nature Institute President and CEO. “This is another milestone in the ongoing recovery of our city and we look forward to working side by side with residents of eastern New Orleans to make this facility a lasting source of pride.”

The centerpiece of the Exhibit Pavilion is a 3,500-square-foot Interpretive Center featuring moveable displays and a three-dimensional depiction of a cypress forest with creatures that live in the water, on the land and in the trees. The design allows for exhibits to be moved easily to convert indoor space for community events.

Around the perimeter is the 1.5-mile Adventure Trail. Visitors also can enjoy a quarter-mile, kid-friendly – though rustic - Discovery Trail. The renovation features about one mile of new boardwalks and several primitive trails.

Restoration of the glass-and-steel greenhouse that was known as the Botany Center is still in the planning stages.

“The original Nature Center was built to address an urgent community need for environmental education programming,” said David Niebuhr, managing director of Audubon Louisiana Nature Center. “The new Nature Center offers expanded educational options and takes advantage of technological advances and construction techniques that are more environmentally friendly and hurricane resistant.”

The Louisiana Nature Center opened its doors on March 23, 1980, offering a scenic interpretation of the Mississippi River Delta and Louisiana Coastal Zone in Joe Brown Park. It was among the first facilities of its kind to receive and maintain accreditation by the American Association of Museums. In 1993, the Nature Center's board of trustees approached the Audubon Nature Institute about a merger. Recognizing that the two organizations shared a commitment to inspire people of all

ages to appreciate the natural world, an agreement was forged a year later to take advantage of Audubon's proficiency in development, marketing, finance and human resources.

Renamed "Audubon Louisiana Nature Center," the attraction thrived under its new structure, welcoming about 85,000 annual visitors, including 45,000 students who were served by outreach programs.

In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath left the Nature Center under six feet of water for more than a month. Its forests were severely damaged and its interpretive spaces were destroyed.

The Nature Center has remained closed since the storm as Audubon's leadership worked with representatives of FEMA, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, city and state government and community leaders to map out a restoration strategy.

Since the storm in 2005, an invasive species of tree, Chinese Tallow, has taken over the site. While much of the Tallow has been removed, there is still a need to replant native Louisiana trees and plants.

The Nature Center's return follows a major rebuilding effort in Joe Brown Park launched by the city of New Orleans that has restored recreational areas and added two new stadiums for high school football and track. The Nature Center restoration is an integral part of the master plan for the area.

"This new, state-of-the-art facility will introduce generations of Louisiana and Gulf Coast families to the wonders of the fragile ecosystems that they call home," Niebuhr said.

#### **Audubon Louisiana Nature Center operating schedule:**

- **Walking Trails** – daily, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- **Front gates and restrooms** – 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- **Exhibit Hall** - Wednesday through Sunday, 10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- **Planetarium** – open for scheduled programming only
- **Classrooms** – daily, by reservation. (Evening programs and overnights available by reservation)

To learn more about reserving spots for family, group, and school programming at the nature center, click <http://audubonnatureinstitute.org/nature-center>

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