

The Paul A. and Veronica H. Gross Wildlife Center of Southwest Florida
Help Florida's Raptors Soar – Construction of a 100 ft. Flyway for Raptor Rehabilitation

The mission of the Wildlife Center is to protect and preserve Southwest Florida's native wildlife through rescue and rehabilitation of sick, injured and orphaned wild birds, land mammals, and reptiles. The **Help Florida's Raptors Soar – Construction of a 100 ft. Flyway for Raptor Rehabilitation** initiative will construct a 100-foot flyway at the Wildlife Center to rehabilitate eagles and other large birds of prey.

The only local facility dedicating 100% of their resources to rehabilitation, the Wildlife Center treated 300 raptors last year, including 13 eagles, and expects 400 this year. Those numbers continue to grow due to a variety of factors, including deforestation, hurricane destruction of nesting sites and human-related injuries and poisonings. This flyway is necessary to continue to rehabilitate birds of prey and is now a Florida state requirement to continue eagle rehabilitation.

The construction of the 20 ft x 100 ft x 60 ft flyway, complete with proper hides and perching, will be large enough and high enough to allow the patients to rebuild their strength and test their soaring and maneuvering skills before being released back into nature, leading to an estimated 25% increased survival rate of raptors rehabilitated in this facility. It would also eliminate the need to transfer patients to another facility for test flying, which is traumatic for the animals.

All inhabitants of our community will benefit from having a strong and healthy raptor population. Vital to the health of our ecosystems, raptors reduce the spread of disease by controlling rodent population, removing carrion, and serving as a barometer of our ecological health.

The total cost of the initiative is \$116,521, with the impact100 SRQ grant funding the majority of the materials and labor cost for the structure. Donated funds will pay for the amount exceeding the Impact100 SRQ grant. Sturdy and hurricane-proof, this facility will be long-lasting and need minimal upkeep, and it will allow the organization to rehabilitate the animals to a greater degree with less personnel than currently required.

The Wildlife Center will track successful outcomes through their database of patients' diagnoses, treatment plans and progress, medications and release. The impact will be seen in an increase in the number of successfully rehabilitated and released eagles and other raptors because they will be stronger and better prepared to return to the wild.

In their 20 years, the Wildlife Center has treated more than 75,000 animals. Their impact on our community is significant, and they are often called upon by Florida Fish and Wildlife, other organizations and concerned citizens to rehabilitate an animal in need. This initiative will enable them to provide a critical rehabilitation flyway for birds of prey.