



POLAR BEARS INTERNATIONAL: COMO ZOO'S NEW POLAR BEAR ODYSSEY EXHIBIT INSPIRES, INFORMS

June 3, 2010 (St. Paul): Robert Buchanan, president of Polar Bears International (PBI) and Krista Wright, vice president of PBI, attended the grand opening of the Como Zoo's new "Polar Bear Odyssey" exhibit today, which emulates a Hudson Bay ecosystem complete with a river-washed stream, rocky cliffs, and evergreen vegetation. The innovative exhibit, Buchanan said, will help visitors make an emotional connection with polar bears and engage them in preserving arctic habitat by cutting their personal carbon footprint.

"Outreach by institutions such as the Como Zoo can make an enormous difference in motivating the public," Buchanan said. "The arctic sea ice that polar bears depend on for catching their prey has been declining in both extent and volume, which is causing negative effects on polar bears in some areas. The best science available indicates this will continue because of rising greenhouse gas emissions, and polar bears throughout their range will be affected. If we are serious about conserving polar bears and their ecosystem we need to act quickly."

The Como Zoo is part of the PBI network of Arctic Ambassador Center zoos. These centers focus on animal well-being and enrichment, take a leadership role in carbon reduction in their communities, participate in PBI polar bear research efforts, and support polar bear conservation through the PBI Polar Bear Sustainability Alliance.

The Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), which recently signed a memorandum of understanding with PBI to work together to develop programs that will engage the public to be part of the solution to climate change.

"We have a short time frame to take action on this issue," Buchanan said, "and zoos are a critical educational tool for the survival of the species. Over 180 million people pass through the turnstiles of AZA-accredited zoos each year. They're people who already care about animals and who are receptive to learning what must be done to conserve them in the wild."

The \$15.3 million exhibit was designed using the most stringent requirements available for polar bears to insure it provides the highest standards of quality care for this threatened species. It was designed with both polar bears and the public in mind—and provides a

multitude of opportunities for the bears to exhibit natural behaviors such as digging, swimming, foraging, and hunting.

“We applaud the Como Zoo for meeting the Manitoba Standards for polar bears and for inspiring people to care about polar bears and other wildlife,” said Dr. Paul Boyle, AZA’s senior vice president of conservation and education. “AZA is developing consistent messages about climate impacts on wildlife that will ease the confusion many people feel about how Earth’s climate is changing, Wildlife is being impacted by these changes, and communicating a consistent message, based on science, can help the national audience visiting AZA zoos and aquariums become part of the solution.”

Dr. Steven Amstrup of the U.S. Geological Survey and a member of the PBI Scientific Advisory Council, explained that if our greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, the Earth’s temperature will be higher than it otherwise would have been. “Greenhouse gases keep our planet livable by retaining the energy from the sun,” he said. “More of those gases, however, mean that more solar energy is retained and the earth warms. One of the most obvious consequences of a warming earth has been the decline of arctic sea ice. The recent declines in sea ice availability have been associated with reduced body condition, reproduction, survival, and population size for polar bears.” Links to Dr. Amstrup’s papers and those of other scientists studying the current and future status of polar bears can be found at www.polarbearsinternational.org.

“The good news is, this is not irreversible, and reaching the large and already interested audience in places like zoos can be an important part of conveying that understanding,” added Amstrup.

According to Buchanan, “Zoos also can assist field biologists to better understand aspects of polar bear biology that are not easily observed in the wild. Currently, zoos are engaged in studies of polar bear hearing abilities, physiology, and aspects of reproduction. They’re also on the front lines with educational outreach.”

Buchanan points out that “because most people will never see polar bears in their native habitat; seeing them in zoos can be a very powerful experience. With the help of zoos around the country, we can inspire people to lower their carbon footprint and arrest the climate warming that is causing the arctic sea ice to melt. This will help assure that zoos are not the only places where polar bears will survive in the future.”

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Polar Bears International is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the worldwide conservation of polar bears and their arctic habitat through research, stewardship and education. Find scientific data on arctic sea ice and the polar bear status report from the International Union for Conservation of Nature at www.polarbearsinternational.org.

Founded in 1924, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the advancement of zoos and aquariums in the areas of conservation, education, science, and recreation. Look for the AZA logo whenever you visit a zoo or

aquarium as your assurance that you are supporting a facility dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great experience for you, and a better future for all living things. The AZA is a leader in global wildlife conservation, and your link to helping animals in their native habitats. To learn more visit www.aza.org.

For over 100 years, the Como Zoo in Saint Paul, Minnesota has charmed, educated and entertained millions of children and adults while fostering an appreciation of the natural world, helping to make Saint Paul the Most Livable City in America. The Como Park Zoo and Conservatory is open 365 days and admission to both the Como Zoo and Marjorie McNeely Conservatory is always free and a voluntary donation is appreciated. For more information, visit www.comozooconservatory.org.

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