



**POLAR BEARS INTERNATIONAL APPLAUDS INDUSTRY- LEADING  
CONSERVATION EFFORTS OF SAN DIEGO ZOO'S POLAR BEAR PLUNGE**

**March 26, 2010** (San Diego, CA): Members of Polar Bears International (PBI) were in attendance today at the grand opening of San Diego Zoo's "Polar Bear Plunge" to applaud the efforts of the zoo to educate visitors on the status of polar bears in the wild and to encourage visitors to help conserve polar bears by cutting their carbon footprint.

"PBI has entered into a memorandum of understanding with the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) to help provide the stewardship and resources to zoos necessary to inspire the public to help conserve polar bears and their habitat. Zoos are a critical educational tool for the future survival of the species. 180-million people come through the doors of AZA-accredited zoos each year – people who obviously already care about animals and who need to know what must be done to conserve them in the wild," said Robert Buchanan, president of Polar Bears International.

"The arctic sea ice which 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, and educational outreach by zoos like San Diego can help create the greatest generation of conservationists the world has ever seen," said Buchanan.

Partnered with PBI, AZA is currently developing a five-year Initiative that builds on work initiated by the San Diego Zoo and a number of other AZA institutions.

"We are developing consistent messages about climate impacts on wildlife that will ease the confusion many people feel about how Earth's climate is changing," said Dr. Paul Boyle, AZA's senior vice president of conservation and education. "Wildlife is being impacted by these changes, and communicating consistently, based on science, can help the national audience visiting AZA zoos and aquariums become part of the solution."

The San Diego Zoo's Polar Bear Plunge is a state-of-the art facility, meeting Manitoba Standards, which are guidelines to ensuring a happy, healthy and enriched habitat for polar bears. It also includes scientific data about climate change and shrinking arctic sea ice – the primary habitat of polar bears – in a manner that's fun and easy to understand for all ages. Most importantly, the exhibit offers quick tips for changing daily habits to help lower green house gas emissions.

"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. 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,” explained Dr. Steven Amstrup of the U.S. Geological Survey and a member of the PBI Scientific Advisory Council. 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](http://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. Personnel at the San Diego Zoo are currently engaged in studies of polar bear hearing abilities, physiology, and aspects of reproduction.”

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.*

*Scientific data on arctic sea ice and the polar bear status report from the International Union for Conservation of Nature is available at [www.polarbearsinternational.org](http://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](http://www.aza.org).*

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