



POLAR BEARS INTERNATIONAL TEAMS UP WITH THE WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES & AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF ZOO KEEPERS ON “POLAR BEAR FOREST” PROJECT

New Wisconsin forests help reduce carbon dioxide emissions and encourage sustainable forestry practices

May 31, 2010 (Bozeman, MT): Today Polar Bears International (PBI) announced the launch of a major reforestation initiative to help combat the effects of climate change on polar bear habitat, with the planting of the inaugural “Polar Bear Forest” located in Wisconsin.

“Polar Bears International is teaming up with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the American Association of Zoo Keepers (AAZK) to plant several 'Polar Bear Forests', with the goal of planting 500,000 acres to help reduce the build-up of CO₂,” said Robert Buchanan, president of PBI.

Pat Murphy, regional forestry staff supervisor with the Wisconsin DNR Division of Forestry in Eau Claire and a PBI Advisory Council member, is spearheading the planting of the Wisconsin Polar Bear Forests, which will serve as a model for other states. AAZK is supporting the initiative through a fundraising challenge for its chapters and local tree-planting efforts.

“Though it might not seem obvious at first, planting trees in Wisconsin helps conserve polar bear habitat in the Arctic,” Murphy said. “Trees act as 'carbon sinks' and absorb carbon out of the air and convert it into plant material. Less carbon in the atmosphere means better conditions to retain arctic ice longer and to improve polar bear habitat and survival.”

With the support of local forestry staff, the inaugural Polar Bear Forest was planted inside the Kettle Moraine State Forest, located in southeastern Wisconsin. Twenty six acres of open fields were planted with a mix of native hardwood and conifer seedlings provided by the Wisconsin State Nursery program.

Murphy projects that this forest plantation will sequester approximately 90 tons of carbon dioxide per year during its expected 85-year lifetime. Secondary benefits include the creation of wildlife habitat, species diversity, protection from soil erosion, and aesthetic beauty.

As part of the project launch, a second Polar Bear Forest was planted on a nearby parcel of nine acres with a similar mix of species. This plantation, Murphy says, will absorb an additional 31 tons of carbon dioxide each year.

Buchanan said that rapid sea ice loss in the Arctic led the U.S. government to list the polar bear as a Threatened Species under the Endangered Species Act in 2008. “The best science available indicates that the sea ice will continue to melt because of rising greenhouse gas emissions, and polar bears throughout their range will be affected,” he said. “If we are serious about conserving polar bears and their ecosystem we need to act quickly—and the Polar Bear Forest project is one way you can really make a difference – no matter where you live.”

Both Polar Bear Forests will be managed in conjunction with surrounding state forest lands, using sustainable forestry practices that meet Sustainable Forest Initiative and Forest Stewardship Council certification standards. Long-term management practices will yield forest products to meet the demands of a consuming society. They'll also generate an economic return on the investment.

“Few people realize that forest products such as wooden furniture continue to sequester carbon,” Murphy said, “whereas an aging and decaying tree actually begins to contribute CO₂ to the atmosphere. Part of our message is that beyond planting a tree today, there are economic benefits to be reaped. Seedlings develop into products that people can use.”

The Polar Bear Forest initiative is part of a 10-year partnership between PBI, the Wisconsin DNR, and AAZK. PBI will help provide funds for reforestation on private lands and also make grants to urban communities. The project also includes an educational component to help residents make the connection between planting trees and saving polar bear habitat by reducing CO₂.

The AAZK is supporting the Polar Bear Forest through their “Trees for You and Me” campaign. This fundraising initiative challenges AAZK chapters to see who can raise the most money for the tree-planting effort. Last year, the AAZK raised more than \$10,000. The Brookfield Zoo was the winning chapter, with a total of \$3,135.

-30-

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.

The Department of Natural Resources is dedicated to the preservation, protection, effective management, and maintenance of Wisconsin's natural resources. To learn more about the DNR Forestry Division, including the “Tree Planting for Climate Change” campaign, visit <http://dnr.wi.gov/forestry/PolarBear/>.

AAZK is a nonprofit volunteer organization made up of professional zoo keepers and other interested persons dedicated to professional animal care and conservation. To learn more, visit <http://aazk.org>.

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