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Association of Zoos & Aquariums and Polar Bears International Form Partnership to Inspire Action on Climate Change

Silver Spring, MD (November 10, 2009) – The Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and Polar Bears International (PBI) today signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to work together to educate zoos and aquarium visitors on the impacts of climate change on polar bears and their habitat.

“The arctic ecosystem is at a tipping point for polar bears, and we need to make a real difference within the next five years to avoid damage to that ecosystem that may take hundreds of years to repair,” said Robert Buchanan, President of Polar Bears International. “The partnership between Polar Bears International and the Association of Zoos and Aquariums maximizes PBI’s resources and AZA’s educational reach to help create the greatest generation of conservationists the world has ever seen.”

“The people of Polar Bears International are leading the fight to save polar bears and their habitat,” said Jim Maddy, President and CEO of AZA. “Their tireless work on the tundra, their constant drive to educate people, and their work in forming partnerships with governments, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations are a ray of hope for polar bears and all wildlife affected by climate change.”

The MOU between AZA and PBI creates a partnership with the goal of developing and implementing a plan to connect people attending zoos and aquariums to the impacts of climate change on polar bears and on the arctic ecosystem on which they depend. PBI is providing funding, resources, educational programming and guest speakers, including the world’s leading polar bear scientists, to the zoos in order to create or enhance educational Arctic displays. AZA is committing to utilize these resources to grow stewardship in their communities and increase research which may assist in the conservation of polar bears in the wild.

“Zoos and aquariums are a critical educational force for the future survival of the species. Currently, 180 million people visit AZA-accredited institutions each year – people who obviously already care about animals and who need to know what must be done to conserve them in the wild,” Buchanan added. “Most people will never see polar bears in their native habitat, which is why seeing them in zoos can be such a powerful experience. Unless we can inspire people to lower their carbon footprint and reverse the climate change that is causing arctic sea ice to melt, zoos will be among the few places where polar bears will survive.”

There are currently 32 AZA-accredited zoos in North America where people can experience the majesty of polar bears. For a list, please see below.

Polar Bears International is a non-profit organization dedicated to the worldwide conservation of polar bears and their habitat through research and education. For more information, visit www.polarbearsinternational.org.

Founded in 1924, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) is a nonprofit 501c(3) 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 an institution dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great experience for you, and a better future for all living things. With its more than 200 accredited members, 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.

AZA-accredited zoos where people can connect with polar bears:

1. Albuquerque Biological Park
2. Bronx Zoo
3. Buffalo Zoo
4. Central Park Zoo
5. Chicago Zoological Society - Brookfield Zoo
6. Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden
7. Cleveland Metroparks Zoo
8. Denver Zoo
9. Detroit Zoo
10. Erie Zoo
11. Henry Vilas Zoo
12. Indianapolis Zoo
13. Lincoln Park Zoo
14. Maryland Zoo in Baltimore
15. Memphis Zoo
16. Milwaukee County Zoo
17. North Carolina Zoo
18. Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo
19. Oregon Zoo
20. Parque Zoologico de Leon
21. Philadelphia Zoo
22. Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium
23. Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium
24. Reid Park Zoo
25. San Diego Zoo
26. San Francisco Zoo
27. SeaWorld Orlando
28. SeaWorld San Diego
29. Seneca Park Zoo
30. Toledo Zoo
31. Toronto Zoo
32. Tulsa Zoo and Living Museum

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