



NEWS RELEASE

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WECHIAU HIPPO SANCTUARY WINS TWO PRESTIGIOUS UNITED NATIONS AWARDS

"Thank you Calgarians for helping the Calgary Zoo's Conservation Outreach program reach across the world."

CALGARY – On October 6, 2008, Calgary Zoo President Dr. Clément Lanthier and Ghanaian tribal leader, Chielinah Bandanaa, proudly attended the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Barcelona, Spain to represent the Wechiau Hippo Sanctuary as one of the top 25 initiatives awarded the United Nations Equator Prize for 2008 (with a \$5,000 prize). At the Congress, they were thrilled to learn that the Sanctuary was among the top five to receive an additional special recognition award from the United Nations (a further \$15,000 U.S. prize).

As the primary supporter of the Wechiau initiative since the sanctuary was formed in 1998, the Calgary Zoo's Conservation Outreach department submitted the nomination on behalf of the Sanctuary. In late August, the zoo learned that Wechiau was to be honoured as a recipient of the Equator Prize 2008 from among 310 nominations. The Calgary Zoo's President, Dr. Lanthier, was invited to attend the ceremonies in Barcelona along with one of the tribal chiefs.

"It was a very moving experience to stand beside Bandanaa and see the pride on his face as he accepted this recognition from the United Nations on behalf of his community and people," said Zoo President and CEO, Dr. Clément Lanthier. "In addition to the pride they feel in the achievement to preserve their lands and ecosystem, and bring economic opportunity to the local people, these financial awards will be significant in continuing to improve life for the people of Wechiau."

The Equator Prize 2008 winners' initiatives illustrate the connection between ecosystem health and human well-being, the absolute connection between conservation and poverty reduction and the significant contributions made by local and indigenous communities.

Ten years ago the three primary chiefs of the Wechiau lands decided to preserve the hippopotamus habitat by creating a sanctuary. This meant great changes for the

people in the area as entire villages were relocated. Working with the Calgary Zoo and others, ecotourism brought the first sign of economic prosperity to these communities. The sanctuary, managed by a board representing the Wechiau communities, is home to over 500 other animals besides hippopotamus and to numerous medicinal plants. It is a successful model for other communities around the globe.

“Soon after the creation of the reserve, we started to reap some gains from the project, especially tourism,” Bandanaa said. “With those gains and the support of our development partners from the industrialized world, especially in Canada, we could then build schools, drill holes for drinking water, and even install solar panels to tap sun into electricity.”

The Equator Initiative, a United Nations-led partnership that supports grassroots efforts in biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation, represents communities and initiatives that embody innovation in astonishing variety, from marine aquaculture to apiculture (beekeeping), eco-tourism to ethno-tourism, afforestation (converting barren lands to forest) to mangrove restoration, oyster farming to cotton farming, seed banks to micro-credit lending, and elephant to hippo protection.

“I do not have sufficient words to adequately thank the many people of Calgary and Alberta who have supported the Calgary Zoo’s Conservation Outreach program over the past many years,” continued Dr. Lanthier. “It is my hope that this recognition from the United Nations to the people of Wechiau shows clearly how the efforts of individuals and a community here in Canada can make such a great difference in the lives of an entire community and ecosystem on the other side of the world. We wish to express our sincere appreciation to all who have made a contribution to this great success.”

Acknowledgements:

- Nature Conservation and Research Centre, Ghana
- Three Key Tribal Chiefs, Wechiau Naa, Tokali Naa, and Gurungu Naa (Chielinah Bandanaa) and the people of the 17 Villages of Wechiau
- Canadian Hydro Developers
- Students and their school communities in Calgary, Edmonton and Ontario
- Numerous Calgary Service Clubs
- Many other caring individuals too numerous to mention

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The Calgary Zoo is part of a professional, accredited association and member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and the Canadian Association of Zoos and Aquariums (CAZA) comprised of caring, trusted experts committed to ensuring that many endangered and threatened species are part of the world's future. AZA and CAZA advocate on behalf of animals with a unified and consistent voice, and collaborate with others committed to their long-term survival. The Calgary Zoo participates in many Species Survival Plans (SSP), a network among accredited institutions designed to breed endangered species in captivity to ensure the best possible genetic diversity and maintain healthy populations in human care. Through our conservation, education and research programs, many animals in our care play an essential role in the survival of their species in the wild.

The Calgary Zoological Society is a charitable organization. Charitable Registration #118824192 RR0001