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*Digital Images Available Upon Request*

## **WORLD WILDLIFE FUND AND AQUARIUM OF THE PACIFIC PARTNER TO HELP SAVE ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST IMPORTANT WILDLIFE HAVENS**

**New film and exhibit on the Gulf of California to open at the Aquarium of the Pacific Wednesday, April 30, 2008 in conjunction with partnership**

**Long Beach, Calif., April 30, 2008**— Described by Jacques Cousteau as *the world's aquarium*, Mexico's Gulf of California is one of five marine ecosystems in the world with the highest diversity of wildlife. But pressures from unsustainable tourism, development, and commercial fishing are threatening the wildlife and the way of life for the people of the region. World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the Aquarium of the Pacific have formed a partnership to help save the Gulf of California.

"After looking for a partner for an in-the-field conservation project for more than five years, the Aquarium was pleased to find one that we expect will have an enormous positive impact, both for the ecosystem and the local people who depend on it," said Jerry Schubel, Aquarium of the Pacific president & CEO.

As part of the partnership, the two nonprofit organizations will debut a new film and exhibit on the Gulf of California on April 30, 2008 at the Aquarium of the Pacific. Through the new exhibition, Aquarium visitors will learn about this diverse habitat, the animals and people who depend on it, and WWF and the Aquarium's role in protecting the gulf. The goal of the new permanent exhibition is to raise awareness about the Gulf of California, the threats facing it today, and how people can help.

"Mexico's Gulf of California is one of the most biologically diverse places on the planet. Human actions are threatening the gulf, and it is now at a tipping point. Through our partnership with the Aquarium, we hope to inspire its 1.4 million annual visitors and others to get involved in protecting this gem before it is too late," said Stephen B. Cox, vice president of WWF-US and director of the Gulf of California Program, WWF.

The new exhibition features a new film and an exhibit highlighting marine life of this region, consisting of a video exhibit, graphics, and two aquarium displays. The new film *A Sea on the Edge*, offered daily in the Aquarium's Honda Theater (free to Aquarium visitors), explores solutions to threats facing the gulf and its inhabitants. Viewers will go above and below the surface to meet the people and animals that rely on the Gulf.

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## **Gulf of California, page 2**

The Aquarium worked with Bowman Design Group, a Hackley+Bowman Project, to transform the former Sea of Cortez exhibit into the *Gulf of California exhibition*. A video screen takes visitors on a journey to explore the unique habitats of the gulf and to meet some endemic and endangered animals that depend on it. In addition, a variety of colorful fish found in the Southern region of the Gulf are featured in a nearly 8,000-gallon exhibit, including king angelfish, Cortez rainbow wrasse, porcupine fish, and Mexican lookdowns. A 1,800-gallon exhibit features other animals of the gulf, including garden eels—tiny eels that bury their bodies in the sand.

The Gulf of California lies between Mexico's mainland and the Baja California Peninsula. It is home to one third of the world's marine mammal species, over 170 seabird species, and over 900 fish species. Five out of the seven species of endangered sea turtles rely on the Gulf of California. The Gulf is also home to animals found nowhere else in the world, including the world's smallest cetacean, a critically endangered animal called the vaquita, and the endangered totoaba fish.

"Choosing eco-tourism in the region, avoiding property purchases in threatened areas, and supporting WWF's conservation actions in the gulf are some ways visitors can turn around the future for the wildlife and communities of this region," said Schubel.

World Wildlife Fund (WWF) is working to achieve a careful balance between meeting the needs of the local people and maintaining a healthy ecosystem in Mexico's Gulf of California. They are focused on three areas for altering the global forces that challenge the future of this unique place: creating a network of marine protected areas; promoting sustainable fisheries and sustainable coastal development and tourism. WWF has a vision for the region: a healthy, productive, and resilient Gulf of California that reliably produces the ecosystem goods and services needed to support human welfare, healthy economies, and biological diversity. WWF has existed for over 45 years. It is the largest multinational conservation organization in the world, working in 100 countries and supported by 1.2 million U.S. members and nearly 5 million globally. WWF combines global reach with science, involves action from global to local levels, and works to ensure the delivery of solutions that meet the needs people and nature. Info: [www.worldwildlifefund.org/GulfCA](http://www.worldwildlifefund.org/GulfCA).

The Aquarium of the Pacific, a nonprofit institution, is dedicated to instilling a sense of wonder, respect, and stewardship for the Pacific Ocean, its inhabitants, and ecosystems. Home to over 12,500 animals, the Aquarium features a variety of programs both on and off-site to engage the public in ocean conservation and environmental education, including Aquarium on Wheels outreach programs for low-income inner city schools and cleanups efforts to help wildlife. The Aquarium of the Pacific is one of the top aquariums in the nation and is ranked in the top two Los Angeles cultural attractions. The Aquarium is open daily from 9 a.m.-6 p.m. (closed Apr. 18-20 and Dec. 25, 2008) and located at 100 Aquarium Way in Long Beach, Calif. Web site: [www.aquariumofpacific.org](http://www.aquariumofpacific.org) / Phone: 562-590-3100.