

# DEVELOPING A CLIMATE OF CHANGE

FOCUSING THE ENERGY OF THE CBSG COMMUNITY ON SOLUTIONS TO CLIMATE CHANGE

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For a number of years, the Conservation Breeding Specialist Group (CBSG) has worked to find a solution or an action that matches both the skills of our community and the scope of the problem we face in climate change. Last year, we brought to our 2012 CBSG Annual Meeting in Melbourne the pressing question: How can we best focus the energy of the CBSG community on solutions to the growing threat of climate change?

Among the things the meeting participants tasked us with was catalysing action to create a movement with the express goal of seeing that ‘no government on the planet can ignore the danger of climate change and all must be actively working to realise “safe” CO<sub>2</sub> atmospheric concentration levels of 350 parts per million (ppm). The people need to tell governments that we will not stand for inaction anymore.’

We immediately began researching existing climate change groups. We found many groups dedicated to climate change action, and some even call themselves movements. The great majority were sector-based, focusing on women, youth, people of the southern hemisphere, and others.

Then we found 350.org.

350.org is an organisation aiming to solve the climate crisis by addressing systemic barriers to climate solutions. They do this through grassroots organising, direct actions, and online campaigns. We studied their website, read articles and books by and about them, investigated their critics, and met with their leaders in Washington DC and Minnesota. The more we learned about 350.org, the more we realised that CBSG didn’t need to start a movement... we needed to join one.

So in October at our 2013 CBSG Annual Meeting, we were proud to announce the launch of our climate change initiative, Zoos and Aquariums for 350. Zoos and Aquariums for 350 links to the 350.org movement and

includes several components that offer an opportunity for all zoos, aquariums, and individuals to join.

Zoos and aquariums and the 350.org movement make a perfect partnership. 350.org is a movement dedicated to bringing atmospheric levels of CO<sub>2</sub> back to 350 ppm — which is precisely what we were tasked with creating. They are also dedicated to improving life on a changed planet. What could be more closely aligned with the core zoo and aquarium mission to conserve nature and teach children about its wonder?

The first part of the movement is divestment from fossil fuel companies. Divestment is the opposite of investment — it means getting out of stocks, bonds, investment funds, or banks whose investments are inconsistent with your personal or institutional values. Any zoo that invests money, whether in stocks, mutual funds, or in an investment bank, can choose to divest from fossil fuel companies and reinvest in solutions that align with your mission of conservation. And there is an increasing body of evidence that this can be done without increasing risk or decreasing returns.

Divestment takes the fight for climate action into a different level. Though work on reducing demand for fossil fuels must continue by reducing personal and institutional carbon emissions, something bigger is at play. The most recent IPCC report states that in order to stop runaway climate change from happening, we must quickly scale back our use of fossil fuels. However, the sizeable income of fossil fuel companies relies upon our dependence on their product. These companies profit from denying climate change and stalling necessary government action.

Divestment is a way of calling these companies out on this behaviour and drawing attention to the moral problem with investing in them at the expense of current and future generations. It tells governments, the financial sector, and the public that zoos and aquariums

are concerned about climate change and the role of the fossil fuel business plan in perpetuating it. We should stop investing in companies that forge ahead in extracting and burning fossil fuels when what we need is a collective movement toward greatly reducing our dependence on fossil fuels.

## LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Before CBSG could ask anyone else to take this step, we had to be willing to do it ourselves.

So in January we brought this request to the Board of the Global Conservation Network, the non-profit organisation established to support the work of CBSG. They made the bold decision to divest CBSG’s reserve funds from fossil fuel companies. As of that day, we have not made any additional investment in funds supporting fossil fuel companies and we are working on our plan to be fully divested within five years. We have very little money in our reserve account and our move towards divestment would be purely symbolic if we were doing it alone. But we are not. We added our voice to those of many other institutions – six colleges, 17 cities, and other foundations and institutions – making the same bold decision. This is the power of the movement and this is how change will happen. Zoos and Aquariums for 350 calls on zoos and aquariums to immediately freeze any new investment in 200 fossil fuel companies that hold the greatest amount of unburned fossil fuel reserves and to create a plan for fully divesting within five years. In addition to shining a light on the importance of where our money is invested, Zoos and Aquariums for 350 also provides an avenue for carbon offsetting. A carbon offset is a reduction in emissions of carbon dioxide made in order to compensate an emission made elsewhere. In other words, it is a payment made in support of a project resulting in reduced carbon emissions, in order



to compensate for the unavoidable carbon emissions of your institution. Many zoos already reduce and offset their emissions, and some are even certified as carbon neutral. Zoos and Aquariums for 350 calls on all zoos and aquariums to reduce their emissions as much as possible and then to commit to offsetting the remainder. This part of the movement is still in the process of being developed, but we're working to identify an excellent carbon offset provider to work with interested zoos and aquariums. Using this universal provider will help us unite our efforts in becoming carbon neutral. Those who have already made progress in this area can report on their successes in this area and be acknowledged for their efforts.

**SHOW YOUR FACE**

Finally, it is important to visually connect our focus on climate change back to the endangered species that it will affect. Zoos and Aquariums for 350 calls on all zoos and aquariums to 'Show the Wild Face of Climate Change' by submitting photos of one or more species in their collection that are specifically climate-threatened. The

photos should contain a sign with the Zoos and Aquariums for 350 logo on it, along with any other words or phrases including the name of the species and your zoo. Finally, Zoos and Aquariums for 350 calls on all zoos and aquariums to support the EAZA and AZA Pole to Pole campaign. Pole to Pole highlights the effectiveness of collective action in reducing energy use. It provides advice and materials to zoo and aquarium visitors and the wider public to help them take individual steps that can make a huge collective difference to endangered species and ecosystems impacted by climate change. When we introduced Zoos and Aquariums for 350 at our meeting in Orlando, the participants responded with great enthusiasm. At the end of the meeting, many stood and voiced their plans to carry this momentum onward and back to their home institutions. We congratulate all these 'founding members' and special thanks go to our first three committed divesters: Lena Linden on behalf of Nordens Ark, Lesley Dickie for EAZA, and Sally Walker.

Other EAZA members who stood and committed to taking action include

Andrea Fidgett (Chester Zoo), Bengt Holst (Copenhagen Zoo), Bryan Carroll (Bristol Zoo Gardens), Frands Carlsen (Copenhagen Zoo), Jo Gipps, John Fa (Durrell Conservation Trust), Kirsten Pullen (BIAZA), Kristin Leus (Copenhagen Zoo), Mark Pilgrim (Chester Zoo), Mark Craig (Al Ain Zoo), and Paul Pearce-Kelly (ZSL).

By joining the movement, greening your institution and your portfolio, and sharing information, passion, and calls for action with your colleagues and visitors, you will make an investment in a liveable future for children and for wildlife. We feel that now is the time for our community to join the 350 movement, which is gaining momentum across the globe.

Together we have the opportunity to take a leadership role in responding to the global crisis of climate change. We have the chance to tackle the source of the problem that, if left unaddressed, will continue to undermine all our conservation efforts. Opportunity to create change is knocking on our door. Will you be next to stand up and answer?

Go to [www.cbsg.org/zoos-aquariums-350](http://www.cbsg.org/zoos-aquariums-350) and join the movement.