



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Dawn Petrick
Director of Park Services
(760)346-5694
dpetrick@livingdesert.org

ZOOS AND AQUARIUMS ANNOUNCE 1 MILLION CARDS CAMPAIGN TO HELP SAVE THE VAQUITA PORPOISE FROM EXTINCTION

Campaign aims to influence Mexico's incoming president to continue conservation initiatives to save the fewer than 30 vaquitas left in the world, which are found only in Mexico

PALM DESERT, CA – (December 3, 2018) - In an effort to save the vaquita porpoise from extinction, zoos and aquariums in the U.S. are launching a public, worldwide **1 Million Cards** postcard-writing campaign. The effort, which is led by Vaquita SAFE (Saving Animals From Extinction), a collaborative effort by Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) member institutions, is working to encourage Mexican President-elect Andrés Manuel López Obrador to continue the country's vaquita conservation initiatives and efforts.

"We are at the most critical point in the vaquita porpoise's conservation history. Right now, there are very few vaquitas left. We have an opportunity to protect them, but we can only do that with the continued support of the Mexican government," said Dave Bader, AZA Vaquita SAFE lead and director of education at the Aquarium of the Pacific.

The vaquita porpoise, *Phocena sinus*, is the smallest and most endangered marine mammal in the world, with fewer than 30 individuals left. Only found in Baja's Upper Gulf of California, the vaquita is at the brink of extinction due to unsustainable fishing practices, which involve using gill nets (that are now illegal) set for other seafood that accidentally entangle the vaquita and other marine animals.

"The most crucial action that we can take is to create a sustainable seafood industry, with product sourced from the Upper Gulf of California. It is the only way to save the vaquita and the hundreds of other species and the three fishing communities in this area," said Dr. James Danoff-Burg, director of conservation, The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens.

The **1 Million Cards** campaign aims to influence President Obrador to continue Mexico's vaquita conservation efforts to create sustainable fishing communities. In addition, the campaign aims to engage and empower Americans to help vaquita conservation efforts and to continue to educate and inspire individuals about the plight many endangered animals face around the world.

Zoos and aquariums around the country are encouraging their visitors and supporters to complete a **1 Million Cards** postcard during their next visit. Each institution will collect the postcards, which will be hand delivered to the Mexican Consulate in San Diego at the end of December.

Vaquita SAFE's long-term goal is to create a sustainable seafood market sourced from the Upper Gulf of California, benefitting the local communities, the economy, and the vaquita, along with the other wildlife in the Upper Gulf.

The Vaquita SAFE initiative focuses on conservation actions, including public engagement, conservation capacity, policy and legislation, and economic development. Leading partnership organizations include the Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach, California; the Cosely Zoo in Wheaton, Illinois; the El Paso Zoo in El Paso, Texas; The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens in Palm Desert, California; the Santa Barbara Zoo in Santa Barbara, California; the Texas State Aquarium in Corpus Christi, Texas; and Wild Lens, a nonprofit video production company.

###