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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Polar Bear Brings Conversation on Climate Change to Sea Center

Spectacular specimen visiting from a Canadian museum challenges marine science facility visitors to contemplate our interconnected world

(Santa Barbara, CA – December 20, 2018) — An approximately nine-foot-tall Polar Bear on loan from Science North, a large science museum in Ontario, Canada, now towers over visitors at the entrance to the Sea Center on Stearns Wharf. The taxidermied bear provides a great opportunity for picture-taking, but interpretive text invites Sea Center guests to make their selfies count by sharing awareness of the challenges facing the species as their habitat vanishes due to global climate change.

The headline for the exhibit panel “Big Bear, Small World” encourages visitors to think about how the fate of the Polar Bear is tied to their own. Melting ice, it says, “is clearly a problem for Arctic species, yet none of us are immune” to the effects of climate change. “Here in Santa Barbara, climate impacts like rising sea levels, more intense fires, droughts, rainstorms, and debris flows have quickly become our new normal. As science continues to detail the specific causes of—and solutions to—climate change, we must respond, for the sake of the natural world and ourselves.”

The Sea Center, which hosts annual science outreach festivals for Underwater Parks Day and World Oceans Day, has kept its educational programming up-to-date with climate science, but most of its exhibits were crafted before the current era of overwhelming scientific consensus about the changes we now face, including warming and acidifying oceans. The serendipitous availability of the bear from Science North created a great opportunity for the Sea Center to bring more up-to-date information about climate science to its exhibits.

Recent renovations at the Sea Center’s sister campus, the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, transformed outdated exhibits to address extreme weather events and other challenges facing humans and the other species with which we share our world. Now exhibits at the Museum (in particular those in the Santa Barbara Gallery, which focuses on the unique ecology of the Santa Barbara region) will have a physical counterpart at the Sea Center in the form of the Polar Bear.

The Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*) is listed as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN); the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service lists the species as threatened. According to the U.S. State Department’s website, “the most significant threat facing the long-term survival of polar bears is habitat loss due to climate change.” In recent years, scientists and journalists have observed that as sea ice dwindles, bears have to travel more and burn more calories to catch the seals they rely on for food, which leads them to starve.

The Sea Center is open daily from 10:00 AM-5:00 PM and the “Big Bear, Small World” exhibit will be on view through October 2019. For more information, visit www.sbnature.org/seacenter.



About the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History Sea Center

Discover the wonders of ocean life at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History Sea Center. Located on historic Stearns Wharf, this highly interactive aquarium and marine education facility offers visitors close encounters with marine animals, and exploration of the Santa Barbara Channel on the Wet Deck. In addition to permanent exhibits, the Sea Center hosts unique events and special educational programming, including Underwater Parks Day, World Oceans Day, and its *Live Dive* series.

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