

ARIZONA-SONORA
**DESERT
MUSEUM**

MEDIA RELEASE

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Editors/Reporters/Producers – Images, interview opportunities and filming opportunities are available on the following dates: Dec. 27-30 and Jan. 2-4. Please feel free to call to arrange a date/time that works best for you.

Warden Aquarium “Rivers to the Sea” To Open January 5, 2013

Tucson, AZ (Nov. 27, 2012) – After several years of planning and a year of construction, the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum’s new Warden Aquarium is readying to open on January 5, 2013. This is the first new major exhibit to open in over 10 years.

The interpretation of the Sonoran Desert region would be incomplete without recognizing the importance of the fresh water rivers that flow through it and the Sonoran Sea, more commonly known as the Sea of Cortez or Gulf of California.

“Without this sea and the summer monsoon that brings moisture from it, the lush Sonoran Desert known today would be an entirely different place,” states Craig Ivanyi, Executive Director of the Museum. “This body of water truly represents a full half of the Sonoran Desert Region – literally 100,000 square miles of ocean and an astounding 900 islands!”

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The aquarium exhibition, “*Rivers to the Sea*”, will highlight the roles of the region’s rivers, including the mighty Colorado, and the Gulf of California. The 1,100 sq. ft. aquarium will house two galleries: one highlighting the region’s freshwater rivers and aquatic life and the other featuring the Sea of Cortez and representative sea life.

Primary funding for the new exhibition was generously provided by the Bert W. Martin Foundation and will include 14 tanks displaying a variety of fresh- and salt-water wildlife. Some of the Museum’s numerous conservation projects impacting many aquatic species will be highlighted in the galleries.

The Sea of Cortez is extremely diverse containing one of the world’s smallest and most endangered marine mammals, the vaquita, a rare type of porpoise, migratory whales that no longer migrate, over 800 types of fish, five species of sea turtles, and the little-known American crocodile. In addition to the varied species of wildlife, the Sea of Cortez provides much of the moisture for the region’s summer rains which have tremendously influenced vegetation on the terrestrial part of the Sonoran Desert Region.

Although visits to the Warden Aquarium are included in the General Admission price, capacity is limited. To mitigate overcrowding, there will be 15 viewing times daily with viewing times assigned to visitors, upon arrival, on a first-come, first-served basis. Or visitors have the option of paying \$5 for a confirmed viewing time reservation

The exhibition area will also include a touch tank with marine invertebrates, like sea stars and hermit crabs, for a hands-on encounter for visitors. At first, the touch tanks will only be available to visitors through behind-the-scenes tours.

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“We made the decision to limit “hands-on” interaction initially, to protect the welfare of the animals,” states Stéphane Poulin, Operational Chief Curator. “This way the animals will have time to assimilate to being handled and adjust to their new environment.” However, the plan is to make these touch tanks available to all visitors towards late spring.

For more information about the Warden Aquarium and to learn about viewing options and private tours visit www.desertmuseum.org/aquarium.

The Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum

The Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum is one of the nation’s leading outdoor, living museums, featuring more than 230 animals and 1,200 varieties of desert plants. Its purpose is to inspire people to live in harmony with the natural world by fostering love, appreciation, and understanding of the bi-national, Sonoran Desert region. The museum is located at 2021 N. Kinney Road, in Tucson Mountain Park adjacent to Saguaro National Park (West). It is open daily year round with operating hours varying by season. Call (520) 883-2702 or visit www.desertmuseum.org for more information.

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