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Off to the Arctic! Tacoma zoo keeper to study great white bears in the Great White North



Tacoma, Wash. – Chat with biologist Derek Woodie about polar bears , and you'll have so much fun that you won't even realize how much you've learned. This Tacoma zoo keeper is already an expert on polar bears and, after his week-long trip through the Arctic to see the giant creatures roam their natural habitat, listening to his keeper talk will be a true educational treat.

Woodie, a staff biologist at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, leaves this Sunday, Oct. 4 for a trip to Churchill, Manitoba in Canada to study wild polar bears. He will experience the tundra in person, meet field scientists and community members, observe polar bears in their natural habitat, and study the effect of global climate change on polar bears.

Woodie is a skillful keeper and natural educator, said zoo general curator Karen Goodrowe Beck.

"This trip will give him hands-on expertise and real-world stories to inspire our visitors to take action to save wild polar bears and their habitat," said Goodrowe Beck.

The trip is organized by Polar Bears International (PBI), a nonprofit organization dedicated to worldwide conservation of polar bears and their habitat through research and education. With funds dedicated to worldwide conservation projects, Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium sent a local high school student to Churchill in 2008 for PBI's teen Arctic Ambassador leadership camp and is thrilled to send a staff biologist this year.

Woodie said he is honored to be a part of the program and excited to share what he's learned with zoo staff and visitors.

"Of course, I can't wait to get up there," he said. "But I'm also eager to return to the States and get to work. I know the experience will deepen my commitment to saving these incredible animals, and I hope to share that encouragement with our visitors every day."

Woodie will blog about his adventure starting Monday, Oct. 5, and a link to the blog can be found at www.pdza.org. Members of the public can submit questions to Woodie at pdzacomments@tacomaparks.com.

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest's only combined zoo & aquarium, is located in Tacoma's beautiful Point Defiance Park, 5400 North Pearl Street. Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium promotes responsible stewardship of the world's resources through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities. The zoo, a division of Metro Parks Tacoma, is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA).