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NEWS RELEASE

- For immediate release -

CALGARY ZOO HERALDS COMMUNITY CONSERVATION SUCCESS IN AFRICA

Calgary, AB – The Calgary Zoo is celebrating the opening of the only organic and largest hand-crafted shea butter processing centre in Ghana, Africa. This facility represents the success of an idea that started with the zoo and three chiefs from the Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary (WCHS) in 1998 having the goal to preserve one of West Africa's last remaining healthy hippo populations.

“This processing centre marks the completion of our ambitious plans towards a successful community conservation initiative with the people of Wechiau and the country of Ghana,” says Dr. Clément Lanthier, President and CEO, Calgary Zoo. “What started out as a hippo conservation story has blossomed into a sustainable and economic business model that helps to safeguard a bright future for nature and for people, especially the women of 17 different communities and their families.”

The WCHS is an UN award winning model of successful community conservation and this facility marks the second reliable revenue stream to the economy of the area, the first being the establishment of the sanctuary itself that has been saving the hippo population and surrounding biodiversity through ecotourism since 1998.

“Most of the world’s biological diversity exists in developing nations and we believe that conservation in developing nations can only be effective and sustainable through the respectful engagement of local communities,” says Dr. Axel Moehrenschlager, Director of Conservation & Science, Calgary Zoo. “We have scientifically demonstrated that investment benefits in Wechiau’s education, health, employment, and infrastructure have also preserved the hippopotamus and hundreds of bird species against all odds. We are proud that the shea factory will escalate success for species and people alike”

The processing centre, formally opened on August 22, 2015, includes women of the 17 sanctuary communities along with some women from the surrounding areas. These women can now safely and organically harvest shea nuts for the creation of butter in their own processing centre as opposed to just selling the raw nuts as now they benefit from this additional economy.

To date, 1,600 card carrying co-op members and harvesters have been selling organic shea nuts with the hope of integrating up to 4,750 members by 2016. This will be the largest hand-crafted shea butter processing centre in Ghana with 150 women trained and employed by Savannah Fruits Company (SFC) to do the butter processing.

The shea nut produces butter for cooking oil and cosmetic purposes and the product that is exported is used for soaps and lotions. In the end, this environmentally friendly industry helps underrepresented tribes and the women of the villages of Ghana. Shea is also known as “women’s gold” not only for golden colour but because of the employment and income it brings to millions of women. The Calgary Zoo is pleased to provide the shea product in its gift shops.

This initiative is in partnership with the Nature Conservation Research Centre (NCRC); the Savannah Fruits Company (SFC); Calgary philanthropist Andrea Brussa; and the Sanctuary Management Board (SMB)

Interviews available upon request and additional media resources including a backgrounder and video can be found here. <http://www.calgaryzoo.com/newsmedia/resources/organic-shea-processing-centre-media-resources>

- 30 -

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The Calgary Zoo is a conservation leader whose mission is to take and inspire action to sustain wildlife and wild places. As a not-for-profit charitable institution, all revenue is reinvested back into conservation activities at the zoo and around the world.

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