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## Exhibit gives close-up view of the effects of global warming

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PROVIDENCE — It's often said that a picture is worth a thousand words. A coalition of groups that contends more needs to be done to protect the nation's plant and animal life from the effects of global warming is now looking to test that saying with a national exhibit that opened last night at the Peerless Building.

"Irreplaceable: Wildlife in a Warming World" is the name of the new 40-print display that, over the next year, will be exhibited in such places as Montana, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York and Washington.

Featuring photographs of polar bears, crocodiles and a host of other species that organizers say might not be able to survive the effects of climate change, the show will be on display here from now until April 26.

Donnell "Trip" Van Noppen, president of one of the four sponsoring groups, Earthjustice, based in Oakland, said organizers decided to have the national debut here in recognition of the role played by U.S. Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I., in sponsoring legislation to address the threat of global warming on imperiled wildlife.

"We felt that one way to engage people about the fact that our wildlife is being threatened was to engage some of the world's greatest conservation and wildlife photographers to contribute images, which is exactly what they've done."

The photos were created by members of the International League of Conservation Photographers, a group organized 2½ years ago by Cristina Mittermeier, a former marine biologist. Mexican by birth, she realized that photography could be a powerful tool to get people to realize the importance of conservation.

To be sure, she said, most of her own concentration has been on photographing indigenous communities, particularly those in the Amazon, which she visits each year. But in October 2006, on a visit to Alaska to photograph Inuits she had an opportunity to photograph some polar bears.

The Inuits had just killed a whale. The carcass was left on the beach and the polar bears were coming to feed. It was not as if Mittermeier was handed the shot on a platter. She hired a local man with a pick up truck and spent 20 hours for several days waiting for the polar bears to come closer. Then one gray day she spotted a mother and her cubs coming closer, until they were about 25 yards away.

Just then, she said, the mother turned to the left, and the sun broke through the clouds for barely a minute. "I jumped out of the truck and literally got off three frames. It wasn't a very smart thing to do. These bears can be very ferocious." Luckily, she got off her shots



One of the 40 photos in the exhibit is Cristina Mittermeier's shot of a polar bear and her cubs. The Providence Journal / Richard Dujardin

without incident and the photo, with cubs following their mother playfully on the ice, is one of the ones featured in the show.

Mittermeier points out that league photographers are devoted to excellence and the ethical standards of photojournalism. "There is no manipulation of images, and there is disclosure of how images were shot because there is a great tendency to deceive the public with images. We want to assure the public that what they see here are things that we saw."

She said she feels a bit guilty about her polar bear shot because she only spent several days trying to get it when photographers she knows have waited as long as 20 years for such a shot.

She said Paul Nickles, who photographed narwhals, a species of Arctic whales, took 10 years to get a shot of them gathered under the ice.

"You have to be a maniacal individual willing to tolerate the cold, the hunger, the isolation and the anger because the shot is not coming for days or even years."

The 40 prints take the viewer to all geographic regions of the United States and run the gamut from bears to crocodiles, monarch butterflies to two other species present in Rhode Island, the maple tree and the piping plover.

Kate Freund, a legislative liaison for Earthjustice, said yesterday that climate change can affect animal habitats in different ways. Polar bears and walrus are

under threat because global warming is melting the ice on which they hunt and rest. "The bears are swimmers but they are not marathon swimmers, and when you take away the ice, they drown."

Salmon are being threatened by global warming because smaller snow packs means less water flowing into streams, cutting down the opportunity for them to spawn. Sea turtles are under threat because the sex of a turtle is determined by the temperature when the egg was incubated.

As the temperature rises, an increasing number of turtles are born female, and they could all be born females if the temperature continue to rise.

Piping plovers are endangered by rising sea levels, and warming temperatures could curtail the growth of sugar maples.

The sponsoring agencies for the traveling exhibit represent four "pillars" — faith, science, justice and art. The faith perspective is provided by Noah, a coalition of Protestant, Evangelical and Christian groups dedicated to care of the Earth, and the science perspective is represented by Conservation International's Center for Applied Biodiversity Science.

The exhibit, off the lobby of the Peerless Building, 150 Union St., will be open from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Thursday, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Friday and 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday, between now and April 26. Admission is free.