

San Diego Zoo Global Applauds Efforts in Mexico to Save Endangered Vaquita Porpoise from Extinction

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Vaquita porpoise. Photo: World Wildlife Fund

An international team of experts has gathered in San Felipe, Mexico at the request of the Mexican government to save the most endangered marine mammal in the world, according to officials with San Diego Zoo Global.

With only about 30 left in the wild, the endangered vaquita porpoise is on the brink of extinction, zoo officials said.

“San Diego Zoo Global applauds this leadership effort to save the vaquita from extinction by bringing it into the protection of human care,” said Bob Wiese, Ph.D., chief life sciences officer, San Diego Zoo Global.

The Mexican government’s ministry of the environment and natural resources began the plan known as [VaquitaCPR](#), which was recommended by the [International Committee for the Recovery of the Vaquita](#). The project involves locating, rescuing and temporarily relocating the animals to an ocean sanctuary on the coast of San Felipe.

“The explicit goal of VaquitaCPR is to return the vaquitas to their natural habitat once the primary threat to their survival has been eliminated,” according to zoo officials.

“Rescuing these animals and placing them in a temporary sanctuary is necessary to protect them until their natural habitat is made safe,” said Dr. Lorenzo Rojas-Bracho, lead vaquita expert and chair of CIRVA. “We realize that capturing even a few vaquitas will be very difficult — but if we don’t try, the vaquita will disappear from the planet forever.”

The vaquita only lives in the upper Gulf of California.

VaquitaCPR field operations, including efforts to locate and bring vaquitas into temporary sea pens, began Oct. 12 and are expected to continue for several weeks, zoo officials said.

VaquitaCPR is an international conservation program led by the Mexican government’s ministry of the environment and natural resources in coordination with the National Marine Mammal Foundation, The Marine Mammal Center and the Chicago Zoological Society.

In addition to key collaborators in Mexico and internationally, U.S. collaborators include Duke University and the U.S. Marine Mammal Commission, with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration contributing technical support.

SeaWorld has also offered its support, according to zoo officials.

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