Green Tales

Planet Vision: Addressing Global Environmental Challenges

By Dr. Elizabeth Bagley

Associations of Zoos and Aquariums-accredited facilities have long been at the forefront of conservation and sustainability action. Seafood Watch, the National Network on Ocean and Climate Change Interpretation, the Aquarium Conservation Partnership, and the Green Scientific Advisory Group with their Green Guides are a few groups offering valuable educational, operational, and policy insights about sustaining life on Earth. In San Francisco, Calif., the California Academy of Sciences, home of Steinhart Aquarium, is determined to build upon our field’s sustainability practice—and help guide it into a new era.

Our team, led by executive director, Dr. Jonathan Foley, has created PlanetVision, a new initiative focused on addressing some of our most important global environmental challenges—including climate change, widespread ecological degradation, and global-scale natural resource depletion. It begins by asking us to see ourselves as stewards of the planet who can thrive within its physical and biological limits. Broadening our planetary perspective helps bring key problems into focus, and new solutions emerge by learning the lessons nature constantly teaches us.

PlanetVision presents a science-based plan to build a sustainable world, where people and nature thrive together. It shows us a detailed blueprint of how we can work together—as individuals and communities, businesses and non-profits, governments and policymakers—to reimagine critical food, water, and energy systems. This framework guides us towards a more sustainable civilization—and ensures a livable planet for future generations.

The path towards a sustainable future begins with conscious hope—especially during this societal moment of paralysis and fear. PlanetVision focuses on implementing solutions rather than dwelling on problems. And it shows how we can collaborate with one another, instead of tearing ourselves apart, to address our biggest challenges.

When focusing on our food system, for example, reducing waste is a powerful solution for feeding our growing human population. To make this solution a reality at the Academy, our food partner Sodexo now gives any “imperfect” produce—like a bruised apple or banana—to our aquarium biologists who can use it to feed animals like our butterflies or arapaimas. This seemingly small act of collaboration helps us reduce food waste, save money, and create an inspiring story to share with our guests who may then pay the practice forward.

Though we’re proud of the Academy’s day-to-day work towards creating a more balanced planet, we’re thrilled to share a new sustainability framework beyond our walls. PlanetVision will launch in our physical space in 2018 and online at PlanetVision.com. Please connect with us—either at AZAs’ Annual Conference in Seattle, Wash., being hosted by the Seattle Aquarium and Woodland Park Zoo, 23-27 September 2018, or virtually—if you’re interested in sharing groundbreaking sustainability messaging and tips for personal practice with your institutional guests. The spaces we fill in our communities bring people hope and an understanding that, together, we hold the keys to building a safer, more balanced future. Join us in sustaining the place we call home. Contact planetvision@calacademy.org for more.

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