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POST GEARING UP TO ANNOUNCE LATEST DISCOVERIES DURING FINAL MEETING OF PARTNERS IN THE CENSUS OF MARINE LIFE

Vancouver, B.C. – As one of 17 projects participating in the Census of Marine Life, which will announce its decade-long research findings on October 4, the Pacific Ocean Shelf Tracking (POST) Program based out of the Vancouver Aquarium has developed leading-edge tracking technology to help a community of independent researchers provide a baseline of information for future generations.

The Census of Marine Life -- one of the largest scientific endeavours ever undertaken -- began in 2000 with the goal of assessing and explaining marine life distribution, diversity and abundance, and has united thousands of researchers worldwide. After a decade of developing technology and techniques to further our understanding of aquatic life, 1,203 new species have been identified by the Census, including 562 crustaceans, 191 mollusks, and many other sponges, invertebrates and microbes. Another 5,000 are awaiting description.

POST technology has been used locally by over 50 scientists to discover for the Census more about the movements of aquatic life on continental shelves along our coastline. POST uses sound to track marine animals along the west coast of North America. Using hundreds of acoustic receivers (think of ears with computer hard drives attached) anchored to the seafloor, POST maintains listening lines running perpendicular to the coast, from shore to the edge of the continental shelf.

The acoustic receivers record passing animals carrying acoustic tags, each one sending out a signal audible to the receivers. Because every acoustic tag makes its own unique sound, each tagged animal can be precisely identified when a receiver hears it. By knowing where a receiver is and when it heard a tag, POST knows exactly where each tagged animal has travelled and when.

An interesting discovery using POST has contributed to the protection of an endangered green sturgeon population. POST detected the unknown and extensive international migration patterns of green sturgeon native to California, who actually move northwards in the winter months. Leaving the waters of California, some were tracked moving as far as the northwest tip of Vancouver Island and onwards to Alaska.

This newly discovered migration pattern led to the American government officially designating 30,000 square kilometers of protected habitat for the threatened sturgeon.

“By applying existing technology in new ways, POST has enabled scientists to follow groups of animals that do not suit other tracking technologies due to size or behavior, such as tags communicating with satellites,” notes Jim Bolger, executive director of POST. “POST is supporting scientists and resource managers looking at entire ecosystems by helping them identify how various species interact in space and time.”

Jim Bolger, Jonathan Thar, POST research program coordinator, and John Nightingale, Vancouver Aquarium president, will be representing POST to announce their findings and discoveries along with 16 other projects and a slew of international committees at the October 4 Census event in London, England. From newly discovered migratory patterns to new species, POST and other contributors of the Census will reveal previously unknown information, shedding new light on life in the vast oceans that we know so little about. Visitors can learn more about the POST Program through the interactive POST exhibit at the Vancouver Aquarium or by visiting www.postcoml.org. Learn more about the Census of Marine Life at www.coml.org.

About Vancouver Aquarium

The Vancouver Aquarium is a global leader in connecting people to our natural world, and a self-supporting, non-profit association dedicated to effecting the conservation of aquatic life through display and interpretation, education, research, and direct action. Learn more at www.vanaqua.org.

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Editors: Jim Bolger, executive director, POST Program, and John Nightingale, president of the Vancouver Aquarium, are available for interviews before, after, and throughout their trip.

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