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Media Contacts:
Roger Germann, Shedd Aquarium
312-692-3265, rgermann@sheddaquarium.org

Jeffrey Potter, Biodiversity Project
608-250-9876, jpotter@biodiverse.org

SHEDD AQUARIUM DIVES DEEPER INTO GREAT LAKES CONSERVATION

*Shedd Partners with the Biodiversity Project
to Launch the Great Lakes Forever Public Awareness Campaign in Chicago*

Chicago – With a remarkable 75 year history in aquatic animal display and education, and with conservation programming that has spanned the globe, Shedd is poised to use its greatest asset, its voice, to address conservation in its own backyard: our Great Lakes. To celebrate World Ocean Day on June 8 with a freshwater twist, Shedd announced today that it is intensifying its commitment to one of the world's greatest natural resources by launching a major conservation initiative to draw attention to the value – and the vulnerability – of the complex Great Lakes ecosystem.

Shedd is taking the lead in the Chicago expansion of Great Lakes Forever, originally launched by Wisconsin-based Biodiversity Project in 2004. The Great Lakes Forever campaign aims to get people thinking and talking about these magnificent bodies of water that 37 million people in the Great Lakes region, including residents of Chicago, Milwaukee, Detroit, Cleveland, and Toronto, depend on for their drinking water, recreation, food and quality of life.¹ More importantly, Shedd and the Biodiversity Project want to inspire Chicago-area residents to take action to ensure that these precious resources are protected far into the future. Shedd's exhibits, public programs, special events and educational outreach will increasingly focus on Lake Michigan and the other Great Lakes.

“Shedd Aquarium has both the opportunity, and perhaps most importantly, the responsibility to use our mission, our exhibits, our people and our programs to make a difference in the Great Lakes,” said Ted Beattie, president and CEO of Shedd Aquarium.

Although Great Lakes Forever was initiated in Wisconsin, the program has had a Chicago connection for several years. The Chicago-based Joyce Foundation provided the seed money to design and launch the program and several Chicago-area environmental leaders have served as advisors for the program since 2003. Working with more than 50 partner organizations last summer, the Biodiversity Project successfully unveiled the Great Lakes Forever campaign throughout the state of Wisconsin. Shedd began to grow its relationship with the Biodiversity Project in 2004 when our common goals became clear. Now, in 2005, Shedd and the Biodiversity Project are bringing that momentum to Chicago. The campaign will meet people where they meet the lake. Lakeshore parks, local yacht clubs, lakeside festivals and the annual Beach Sweep will all be venues for promoting Great Lakes awareness and conservation action.

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“This campaign is an exciting opportunity to partner with one of the premier conservation and education organizations in the Great Lakes basin – the Shedd Aquarium,” said Jane Elder, executive director of the Biodiversity Project. “We’re not just trying to achieve a short-term victory. Instead, together, we’re trying to raise the overall profile of a suite of threats to the Great Lakes. We’re trying to build a deeper constituency for the lengthy effort that it will take to restore, protect and care for one of the world’s largest freshwater ecosystems.”

Through the awareness campaign and other programs, Shedd Aquarium will demonstrate how much the lakes affect the daily lives of people in the Chicago area. For instance, Shedd will highlight the issue of Chicago-area beach closings by explaining what’s known of their cause and, more importantly, what can be done to prevent them in the future. According to the Chicago-based Alliance for the Great Lakes, there were a record 1,473 beach closings and advisories for Lake Michigan in 2003. By comparison, beaches closed 919 times in 2002 and only 182 times in 1996.

As part of its broad Great Lakes conservation initiative, Shedd Aquarium also announces plans for a Great Lakes invasive species exhibit, scheduled to open in autumn 2005. The exhibit will educate visitors about the serious damage that invasive species have caused in the Great Lakes, including the extinction or depletion of native fish and sport fish and economic damages incurred through fisheries losses and remediation efforts.

“For more than 75 years, Shedd Aquarium, the world’s largest indoor aquarium, has existed side by side with North America’s largest body of fresh water: our Great Lakes,” said Dr. Jeff Boehm, Shedd’s senior vice president of conservation science. “The aquarium is a national leader and catalyst for helping the public appreciate aquatic life and understand how water affects everybody, particularly those of us who live near this tremendous freshwater resource. Shedd Aquarium has the distinction of being the only Coastal Ecosystem Learning Center on the Great Lakes. Our voice is one that reaches millions of people annually and we have come to be recognized for creating excitement about aquatic conservation issues and promoting solutions. This new initiative encourages the public to learn about the Great Lakes, celebrate them and find out how their actions impact them.”

John Shedd Reed, grandson of aquarium founder John G. Shedd, is convinced that the Great Lakes will become increasingly important. “Demographers tell us that as the world population increases, and the demand for water increases, you’re going to find people gravitating toward the seacoasts and toward the big lakes,” he said. “And they predict greater and greater population here in the Chicago/Great Lakes area. I think it’s very important for the aquarium to be involved in solving the problems facing the lakes.”

Shedd Aquarium’s emphasis on Great Lakes conservation provides teachers with a valuable resource: Beginning in autumn 2005, Shedd’s educational curriculum, workshops and programming for teachers will focus on the Great Lakes. “When Shedd asked its teacher advisory board to choose an educational topic to focus on, the overwhelming choice was the Great Lakes,” said Leslie Drish, teacher services manager. “Until now, there has not been any organization with Shedd’s extensive outreach capabilities that has been able to provide high-quality educational materials for children about the Great Lakes. Shedd’s emphasis on the Great Lakes will provide teachers with an incredible resource, and enable millions of children to learn about their own connection to Lake Michigan.”

“Shedd Aquarium is the world’s aquarium, but Chicago is our home and Lake Michigan is our backyard” said Jeff Boehm. “With our partners, we look forward to bringing our strengths to bear to help conserve these treasures and make a difference in our own community”.

For more information, visit www.greatlakesforever.org or www.sheddaquarium.org.

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*Shedd Aquarium is supported by the people of Chicago and the State of Illinois.
Shedd Aquarium is an accredited member of the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA) and the
Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums.*

¹ Source: Great Lakes Forever