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Smithsonian Unveils New Webby Award-Winning Website Dedicated to Ocean Education and Stewardship

In celebration of World Oceans Day, the Smithsonian Institution announces a pioneering new website designed to inspire awareness, understanding and stewardship of the world's ocean. Led by the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History and in collaboration with more than 20 organizations, *The Smithsonian Ocean Portal* utilizes state-of-the-art, interactive Web technologies to create an online community where visitors can deepen their personal connection to the ocean and continually build upon their knowledge of and concern for the ocean with others. The Portal was recently named the People's Voice Winner for "Best Cultural Institution Website" in the 2010 Webby Awards competition.

"In light of the catastrophic oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, the need for comprehensive up-to-date information on the ocean is more crucial now than ever before," said Cristián Samper, director of the National Museum of Natural History. "The Smithsonian Ocean Portal will build awareness of ocean issues by providing scientifically accurate information to visitors in a way that is timely, educational and engaging."

Visitors to the Smithsonian Ocean Portal can navigate their own exploration of the ocean by accessing a host of resources made available through the museum's extensive marine science network and the best-in-class educational, scientific and intellectual assets from the Portal's trusted partners. Portal content is divided into key areas of focus to offer visitors a framework for their experience and to also help those visitors who have a destination in mind quickly find what they are looking for. Visitors can choose from a variety of online ocean adventures and educational quests, including:

- Ocean Life & Ecosystems, offering information about marine life species and the environments in which they live;
- Ocean Science, introducing visitors to the latest experiments and research of ocean scientists around the world;
- The Ocean Over Time, providing a look at the evolution of the ocean;
- For Educators, providing teachers with activities, lessons and educational resources;
- Photo Essays, highlighting feature stories on a variety of topics relating to ocean life;
- The Ocean & You, where visitors can learn about important ocean issues and ways to make a positive impact;
- Find Your Blue, a section designed to inspire visitors to participate, share, and check out featured actions that they can take to help the ocean.

The website also includes the Ocean Portal Blog and RSS feeds where visitors can go to stay up-to-date on the latest in ocean news. Visitors can also access Ocean Portal content and participate through Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr.

"The Ocean Portal is a groundbreaking project for the Smithsonian," said Michael Edson, director of web and new media strategy at the Smithsonian Institution. "Ten or twenty years ago we might have been satisfied just to capture and communicate the current state of ocean science to a passive audience. Now, the Ocean Portal is showing us another way: we're bringing together citizens, students, educators, and researchers from dozens of Institutions to explore the dynamic complexities of the ocean in real time. This collaborative approach brings a human focus to science, and begins to harness the vast creative potential of the Smithsonian's amazing audiences.

Unlike many traditional websites, the Ocean Portal is not static, one way or rigid in architecture. Instead, the Ocean Portal is a constantly evolving environment enhanced daily by rich content and media from its ocean collaborators, as well as the ebb and flow of visitor interactions and user-generated content. The museum is seeking critical audience feedback on the content and functionality of the Portal to help set future direction for enhancements to the site and ensure an optimal visitor experience.

The Ocean Portal represents the third pillar of the National Museum of Natural History's Ocean Initiative, created to further the museum's mission to increase ocean awareness and stewardship. The other pillars of the initiative include: the Sant Ocean Hall, the museum's largest exhibition to-date and the only exhibition in the country devoted exclusively to a global view of the

ocean, and the Sant Chair for Marine Science, currently filled by eminent marine biologist Nancy Knowlton.

The Smithsonian Ocean Portal collaborators include: ARKive, BBC Earth, Census of Marine Life, Centers for Ocean Sciences Education Excellence Network, Consortium for Ocean Leadership, EarthEcho International, International Union for Conservation of Nature, Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology, MarViva, Monterey Bay Aquarium, Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute, National Geographic Society, National Marine Educators Association, Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, New England Aquarium, Oceana, Ocean Conservancy, The Pew Charitable Trusts, Save Our Seas, Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego, SeaWeb, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. For more information on the Smithsonian Ocean Portal, including a calendar of related public programs, visit www.ocean.si.edu.

The Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, located at 10th Street and Constitution Avenue N.W. in Washington, D.C., welcomed more than 7.4 million visitors in 2009, making it the most-visited museum in the United States. The museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Admission is free. More information about the museum is available at www.mnh.si.edu or by calling (202) 633-1000, TTY (202) 633-5285. In addition to the Web site, learn more about public programs, get the latest updates and access to insider videos and images via [Facebook](#), [Flickr](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#).

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