**Sample Op-ed**

*Keep word count to approximately 700 words. Change wording highlighted for your specific situation and customize as you wish.*

From sea to shining sea, our country is a beautiful one, with wonderful natural areas and a wealth of plants and animals. Indeed, we depend on a healthy balance of life with productive ecosystems and a great diversity of species for our own species to survive and thrive.

As leaders in wildlife care and conservation, protecting nature is a major part of our mission at [your aquarium/museum/zoo]

(CONSIDER INSERTING HERE a short paragraph about the particular relevance to your aquarium, zoos, or museum, such as the need to to protect a specific species near you, a community effort to conserve a local area, or a personal connection to specific animal or place, which will make it interesting for the local audience)

The natural world provides critical resources that sustain all life on Earth — from the air we breathe and the water we drink, to the food we eat and the ecosystem services that counteract the damaging impacts of climate change. There is no substitute for what nature provides.

Today, however, we are facing a biodiversity and climate emergency. We’ve lost 60% of all terrestrial wildlife in the last 50 years and we’ve lost 90% of all big ocean fish in the last century. Yet we know that nature can rebound, and in protected areas, life comes back. Natural ecosystems, including biodiversity hotspots and underrepresented habitats and species, are key to maintaining human prosperity in a changing world.

Right now, thanks to the “America the Beautiful” initiative, we have a new national goal of conserving 30% of our nation’s diverse lands, waters and ocean by 2030. This is a goal that we can all get behind. 86% of Americans – including strong bipartisan majorities – support it. And in the U.S., we’re getting there.

Today, 23% of America’s ocean is in a strongly protected area – special ocean places that are akin to national parks or wildlife areas on land. But we need more of these conserved areas in the ocean, and we also need them to be more representative of the vibrant diversity of habitats and ecosystems in our nation’s waters. While 12% of U.S. lands are currently protected in a natural state, we are simultaneously losing a natural area the size of a football field every 30 seconds, and many animals such as the [insert relevant local/”SAFE” example] are facing an uncertain future.

(CONSIDER INSERTING HERE more information on the status/need for conservation of the ocean and/or terrestrial areas)

But we can and need to do more in [your community/state/region]. If we act now, we can conserve these areas, help the wildlife and help ourselves too.

Here in [your community/state/region], [your aquarium/museum/zoo] is especially proud to be [insert local conservation project that’s important to you], which will help us reach our national goal of 30x30.

Americans have a strong track record of solving environmental challenges. We also have a strong legacy of ocean and land conservation. Advancing to 30x30 is an opportunity to work towards a more inclusive and equitable vision for nature conservation, one that better reflects our local and national values.

By working in an inclusive and collaborative way, and supporting locally driven efforts, we can achieve this goal, and ensure that our communities thrive; that we protect the great diversity of life we are blessed with; and that we give the lands and the ocean and their wildlife a chance to adapt to climate change. We can also make sure that all Americans have access to the outdoors, and we leave a legacy of a healthy planet with healthy lands, rivers, lakes and ocean waters, and the awe and wonder they inspire.

[Your aquarium/museum/zoo] is committed to saving wildlife from extinction, and we know if we don’t act quickly, the problem will only get worse. Complex life has existed on Earth for about 550 million years, and it is now threatened with a sixth mass extinction. The science is clear that protecting at least 30% of our lands, waters and ocean is critical for human society, now and for the future. Conserving and restoring natural areas is an effective strategy to buffer against the worst impacts of climate change. [Your community/state/region] depends on the natural systems that provide our food, clean air, and safe drinking water, and are the source of our well-being and economic security.

We in [your community/state/region] should stand up, be part of the solution, and adopt the goal to protect 30% of our lands, waters and ocean by 2030. We applaud the Biden Administration’s efforts and encourage [list your Representative/s and/or your Senator/s and locally elected officials] to add their voice to this critical need and opportunity. The actions that our leaders take (or fail to take) this year will determine the health of our planet and security of future generations for decades to come.

We must not squander our children’s inheritance. Our leaders must act now.