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# NEWS RELEASE

## Minnesota Zoo Announces Opening of *Russia's Grizzly Coast* Exhibit and Redesigned Central Plaza

*Spectacular, one-of-a-kind \$30 million project to open June 7, 2008*

**Apple Valley, MN – May, 2008:** On June 7, 2008, the Minnesota Zoo will open a spectacular, multi-million dollar exhibit that is both unique in scope and is the largest in its history: *Russia's Grizzly Coast*. Authentically replicating the landscape and animal communities of the Russian Far East region, the exhibit will feature grizzly bears, sea otters, wild boars and Amur leopards—the most endangered of all wild cats.

A multi-sensory exhibition, *Russia's Grizzly Coast* represents the rugged terrain of a region that is one of the most spectacular environments on the planet. The exhibit opening coincides with the Minnesota Zoo's 30th anniversary, and includes a family-friendly renovation of the Zoo's Central Plaza. "We are excited to offer our guests a series of marvelous new experiences, ranging from the fun of splashing in the water sculpture at our new Central Plaza, to the drama of watching grizzlies diving for fish in their geyser-fed pool," said Minnesota Zoo Director/CEO Lee Ehmke. "We anticipate *Russia's Grizzly Coast* will take our Zoo to a new level of excellence."

### Russian Far East

Known as one of the last great wilderness areas on earth, the Russian Far East is home to an amazing diversity of animals, including some of the world's largest predators. But the environment and animals of this area are in danger. The Minnesota Zoo—and the new *Russia's Grizzly Coast* exhibit—will play an important role in educating and promoting conservation of this little-known but extraordinary place. Creating an exhibit about the Russian Far East is a great fit for Minnesota because of similar climates: both places are located along the 45th parallel. The new exhibit will build upon the Zoo's successful history of exhibiting and conserving cold-climate animals.

### Zoo Celebrates 30 Years

After years of dreaming and planning, the Minnesota Zoo opened on May 22, 1978. Called the "New Zoo" back then, it featured 1,200 animals representing 238 species. Fast forward to today,

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and you'll experience a zoo that has doubled its animal collection and has become a worldwide leader in conservation. The Minnesota Legislature has acknowledged the Zoo's commitment, effectiveness and impact, and since 2005 has appropriated over \$40 million in bonding to ensure the Zoo's future.

### **Zoo Leadership**

At the Zoo's helm is Lee Ehmke, an award-winning exhibit designer and committed conservationist, who assumed the position of Zoo director in 2000. Under Ehmke's leadership, the Zoo has developed a strategic plan with an overarching goal of becoming one of America's top 10 zoos. "There are more than 200 zoos and aquariums accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) in North America, and while no formal ranking system exists, there are a number of institutions that are widely acknowledged as the gold standard of the profession," states Ehmke. "A variety of factors go into determining these standards, but by any measure, the Minnesota Zoo aspires to be one of the best."

Adds AZA Executive Director Jim Maddy: "Russia's Grizzly Coast at the Minnesota Zoo will become one of the most popular wildlife encounters in the world. It's beautiful, it's powerful, it has it all. It's a model of collaboration between scientists and designers who have captured every detail of this spectacular natural landscape. These grizzlies and otters should feel right at home."

The Minnesota Zoo is located in Apple Valley, just minutes south of Mall of America. For more information on the Zoo or *Russia's Grizzly Coast*, call 952.431.9500 or visit [mnzoo.org](http://mnzoo.org). The Minnesota Zoo is an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA).

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