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Conservation Organization Divests from Fossil Fuels

The Conservation Breeding Specialist Group (CBSG) today announced that it has decided to divest from fossil fuel companies in its investment portfolio. The international conservation organization has set itself a goal to be completely fossil fuel free by 2017.

“We want CBSG’s divestment to serve as a model and provide an invitation to the zoo and aquarium community to join us in this movement,” said Onnie Byers, CBSG chair. “Many zoos and aquariums are going to great lengths to green their institutions. It is equally consistent with their mission for them to green their portfolios as well.”

While the organization’s focus remains on conservation planning for species, climate change stands to undermine all other conservation efforts. For many years, CBSG and its conservation colleagues have been looking for solutions to this growing threat.

CBSG started looking specifically into fossil fuel divestment after its 2012 annual meeting, where CBSG members called for a social movement against climate change. From there, Byers came upon the 350.org divestment movement — a movement that generates effective action to encourage the governments of the world to take the necessary steps to return atmospheric levels of CO₂ to 350 ppm — and found that it aligned perfectly with CBSG’s goals.

The CBSG’s finances are held by the Global Conservation Network (GCN), a not-for-profit organization established to support the work of CBSG. After researching GCN’s investments, Byers was surprised to find fossil fuel holdings present in the organization’s investment funds. This came with the realization that it makes no moral or practical sense for CBSG to finance conservation activities by investing in companies whose business plan is detrimental to the long-term survival of wildlife. So, in January 2013, CBSG received approval from the GCN financial board for divestiture. Currently, the organization is researching where and how to reinvest.

The Conservation Breeding Specialist Group (CBSG) is an international conservation organization whose mission is to save threatened species by making conservation efforts more effective. CBSG accomplishes this by facilitating workshops for stakeholder inclusive conservation planning, and using science-based tools to identify the optimal ways to manage a species (both in the wild and in captivity) to give it the best chance of survival. CBSG has a volunteer membership network with representatives from zoos and aquariums, field conservation organizations, other conservation groups, governments, colleges, universities and research institutes. It is based in the Minneapolis area.