

America's natural places online

NatureServe and the National Geographic Society will collaborate to create a new online conservation and educational resource for the land protection community and the public, backed by a \$5 million grant from the West Hill Foundation for Nature.

The project aims to increase the pace and effectiveness of land protection investments in the United States by inspiring and informing place-based, collaborative conservation efforts in every state. Harnessing the best available conservation science and information technology, the partners will create an interactive online "encyclopedia" with a state-of-the-art map viewer that integrates detailed maps, text, photos, statistics, audio, and video about America's natural places.

The project is the vision of Carl W. Knobloch Jr., an Atlanta-based businessman and philanthropist who is the founder and chair of the West Hill Foundation for Nature. "America's natural resources -- things like clean water and fresh air, habitat for wildlife, and productive farmland and ranchlands -- are just as important to sustaining our economic strength as the things we measure in the GNP," said Knobloch. "I hope this project can create a sense of urgency for our government, private landowners, and all Americans to work together on a sufficient scale while there is still time to preserve our precious heritage." The website will be a valuable resource for anyone carrying out land protection, including land trusts, state and local governments and natural resource agencies, and private landowners. Specific goals include:

- Enabling multimedia exploration of America's natural places and open spaces;
- Integrating, mapping, and viewing conservation priorities identified through multiple initiatives, at local, regional, and national scales;
- Providing a set of useful online tools for conservation planning and priority-setting.

The project will unite the complementary skills of two premier nonprofit organizations -- NatureServe, a leader in conservation science, and National Geographic, a leader in scientific research, education, and media. In addition to the website, the project will include a printed wall map about natural lands and open space in America. A number of conservation organizations and state agencies will be partners in the initiative. The website and other products will be rolled out by the end of 2008.

"All conservation is driven by a deep commitment to a place," said Mary Klein, NatureServe's President and CEO. "This project will use web-based technology to help people explore, understand, and conserve the places that matter to them the most. We are especially pleased to be working with

National Geographic and other partners to achieve this goal. Our hope is that this website will become conservation's new home page."

"National Geographic maps have been helping people better understand and appreciate the planet for over 90 years," said Allen Carroll, National Geographic's chief cartographer. "National Geographic's mapping expertise combined with NatureServe's knowledge of conservation science will provide an exciting new tool that will help raise the profile and effectiveness of conservation in the United States."



A Project Advisory Council consisting of nationally recognized leaders in science, academia, and conservation has been formed to help ensure that the website materials and tools meet the highest scientific and conservation standards. "This will be a great resource for the nation's 1,700 land trusts that are working in their respective communities to save undeveloped lands that are important for clean water, wildlife habitat, working farms, public recreation, and scenic views," commented Rand Wentworth, President of the Land Trust Alliance and a member of the Project Advisory Council. "This program matches technological muscle with the inspired hearts of many community volunteers, working together to save lands they love." ■

NatureServe is a nonprofit conservation group dedicated to providing the scientific basis for effective conservation action. Visit us online at www.natureserve.org.

The *National Geographic Society* is one of the world's largest nonprofit scientific and educational organizations. Founded in 1888 to "increase and diffuse geographic knowledge," the Society works to inspire people to care about the planet. For more information, visit www.nationalgeographic.com.