

PRESS RELEASE

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Colorado to Help Pilot \$5 Million Online Guide to America's Natural Places

FORT COLLINS – Colorado is one of five states selected to pilot a \$5 million project to implement LandScope America, an online conservation and educational guide for the land protection community and the public. LandScope Colorado will be headed by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program, or CNHP, a unit of Colorado State University.

“Colorado is pleased to be a part of the LandScope America project,” said Gov. Bill Ritter. “Colorado has a long tradition of being at the forefront of balancing natural-resource protection with the needs of our residents, businesses and visitors. Our historical connection with the environment, along with our commitment to responsible natural-resource management, makes Colorado a perfect state to showcase the LandScope America project.”

The LandScope Colorado Web site will provide a way for people immerse themselves in stories about Colorado's lands told through writing, photography, video and audio. The site will gather conservation information from authoritative sources in the state providing the public with a one-stop shop for reliable data about the state's natural areas.

The Soapstone Prairie Natural Area, located in Larimer County north of Fort Collins, has been selected to illustrate how the online guide will work on various landscapes statewide. The Soapstone Prairie, recently protected by a local initiative, extends across more than 18,000 acres of hilly short-grass prairie vegetation. The city of Fort Collins and partners plan to make Soapstone accessible to the public by 2009.

A national historic landmark, Soapstone Prairie safeguards well-preserved Folsom sites which contain relics of populations that lived there more than 12,000 years ago. Additionally, the prairie's rich wildlife includes pronghorns, elk, foxes and eagles.

CNHP, which has more than 25 years of experience in identifying and monitoring Colorado's biological resources, identified Soapstone Prairie as a critical piece of Colorado's natural heritage during biological surveys in 1995 and 2005.

“Soapstone Prairie was an obvious site to conserve. It's a rare jewel of intact short-grass prairie located so close to the metropolitan area and directly connected to the Rocky Mountain region,” said Renée Rondeau, CNHP director. “We are very enthusiastic to be part of this initiative. We hope through this Web site to provide the public with all the tools needed to understand and conserve Colorado's natural treasures.”

LandScope America – a collaborative effort between NatureServe and the National Geographic Society – is designed to increase the speed and effectiveness of land-protection investments in every state by offering a Web site that informs and inspires collaborative place-based conservation. From outdoor recreation opportunities to information on conservation planning and priority-setting, LandScope America will offer a well-rounded online guide to America's working and wild lands. In addition to Colorado, other pilot states are Florida, Virginia, Washington and Maine.

“As a network of organizations, NatureServe has always valued the importance of sharing knowledge. Now, through LandScope America, we will help bring conservation into focus by sharing the knowledge of a variety of expert collaborators via the Internet,” said Mary Klein, president and CEO of NatureServe.

Planned for release in fall 2008, this comprehensive online resource will provide local governments, land trusts and private landowners the best-available conservation science, information technology and professional expertise.

Preview demonstrations of LandScope America will take place on Oct. 1 at the NatureServe Conservation Conference in Golden, Colo., and on Oct. 5 at the Land Trust Alliance Rally in Denver. For complimentary media passes to NatureServe's Conservation Conference, contact Cristiane Nascimento at (703) 908-1839 or cristiane_nascimento@natureserve.org. Starting Oct. 1, the preview site will be available at www.landscape.org.

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NatureServe is a non-profit conservation group dedicated to providing the scientific basis for effective conservation action. Representing a network of 80 natural heritage programs and conservation data centers in the United States, Canada, and Latin America, NatureServe is a leading source for detailed scientific information about threatened plants, animals, and ecosystems. Visit us online at www.natureserve.org.

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