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Montana Natural Heritage Program Top Leader in Technological Advancement in the Western Hemisphere

Arlington, Virginia – The Montana Natural Heritage Program received the “Outstanding Technological Advancement Award” for developing a new system that has completely changed the way flora and fauna data are monitored. The new system allows the program to efficiently add or update hundreds of species records to better monitor and protect the state’s most precious species, such as the harlequin duck.

“The Montana Natural Heritage Program staff has pioneered the development of new tools that improve conservation effectiveness not only in Montana but also throughout NatureServe’s network,” said Mary Klein, President for NatureServe.

The Montana Natural Heritage Program (MTNHP) revolutionized the data processing system by developing a new automated process that greatly speeds entry of new Element Occurrences (EO) records to the main database. These records identify locations of “Species of Concern” or important habitat areas. In the past year, the new system has enabled the MTNHP to double their database from approximately 6,000 records to more than 12,000. This provides government agencies, business, and the public with highly accurate information to effectively manage and conserve Montana’s outstanding natural heritage.

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The Montana program was also one of the first programs to implement and field-test new methods for ranking species status in the 2005 “Animal Species of Concern” review. This new ranking became the cornerstone for prioritizing species in Montana’s State Wildlife Action Plan (SWOT).

“We’re extremely happy with the award and international recognition of our staff’s efforts,” said Sue Crispin, Director of the MTNHP. “We look forward to sharing these new technologies with other programs in order to better monitor species that may be in trouble.”

Montana’s program was selected for special recognition among 75 similar natural heritage programs and conservation data centers that constitute an international network across the United States, Canada, and Latin America. The award was presented at Leadership Conference held in Hunt Valley, Maryland in April 2006. Established in 1985, the Montana Natural Heritage Program is the state’s source for information on the status and distribution of Montana’s native animals and plants, emphasizing species of concern and high quality habitats such as wetlands. The Natural Heritage Program brings to Montana the “big picture” information on the true status of species and habitats by collecting, verifying and disseminating information to a broad community of users for many applications. To learn more, visit <http://mtnhp.org>.

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NatureServe is a non-profit conservation group dedicated to providing the scientific information, technology, and services needed to guide effective conservation action. Representing a network of 75 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.