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PRESS RELEASE

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Nebraska Natural Heritage Program Receives National Award for Scientific Excellence

Arlington, Virginia – The Nebraska Natural Heritage Program has received a national award for Outstanding Scientific Advancement for its instrumental role in developing the guiding scientific methodology and data products used in the Nebraska Natural Legacy Project. The Nebraska Natural Heritage Program, a program within the Game and Parks Commission’s Wildlife Division, was selected for special recognition by NatureServe, the non-profit conservation group that coordinates an international network of 80 similar natural heritage programs across the United States, Canada, and Latin America.

“The exceptional efforts of the staff at the Nebraska Natural Heritage Program have led to important improvements in conservation planning at the state level,” said Mary Klein, President and CEO of NatureServe. “This award commends the program’s scientific excellence and leadership. The Nebraska Natural Legacy Project itself is a model wildlife action plan that we hope other states will emulate.”

The Nebraska Natural Legacy Project, part of a nationwide effort to develop State Wildlife Action Plans for every state, is the first attempt to develop a statewide blueprint to conserve all of the wildlife and biological diversity of Nebraska. “It’s one of the largest collaborative efforts ever undertaken on behalf of conservation in the state’s history,” said Rick Schneider, an ecologist and Coordinator of the Nebraska Natural Heritage Program (NENHP). “We’re very proud to receive this award which celebrates the efforts of all the partners who worked together to develop this project.”

“The data from the Nebraska Natural Heritage Program provided a solid, science-based foundation for the identification of priority landscapes across the state within the Nebraska Natural Legacy Project,” said Ritch Nelson, State Wildlife Biologist with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, one of 20 organizations represented on the project’s partnership team. “In addition, the ability of the natural heritage program staff to assemble the information into a useable format made the process much more streamlined.”

Nebraska’s native wildlife includes more than 60 amphibian and reptile species, 80 fish species, 400 bird species, 95 mammal species, nearly 1,500 types of plants, and tens of thousands of invertebrate species that live within 70 different habitat types. Applying the best available scientific data, the NENHP identified at-risk species using natural heritage conservation status ranks and identified habitat types, or ecological communities, using the U.S. National Vegetation Classification.

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These data were combined with geographic information systems (GIS) analyses to identify 40 priority landscapes for conservation action. These unique Nebraska places include landscapes such as the Oglala Grasslands, the Central Loess Hills, the Sandstone Prairies, and the Elkhorn Headwaters. The plan contains detailed information on each of the priority landscapes, such as which at-risk species and habitat types are found there, the threats and stresses affecting them, and recommended conservation actions.

- To learn more about the Nebraska Natural Legacy Project, visit <http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/wildlife/programs/legacy/legacy.asp>.
- To learn more about State Wildlife Action Plans, visit http://www.teaming.com/state_wildlife_strategies.htm.

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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 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.