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For Immediate Release

National Science Foundation Grant Will Promote Open Access to Biodiversity Data

Arlington, Virginia —The National Science Foundation (NSF) has awarded a grant of nearly \$1.1 million to NatureServe, a non-profit conservation organization, to pursue development of a system for delivering biodiversity data over the Internet. The goal of the project is to improve online access to the detailed locational data on at-risk plants, animals, and natural communities developed by NatureServe and its network of natural heritage member programs, which collectively are the nation's leading source for information on threatened species and habitats.

For the past 30 years, the hundreds of scientists of the NatureServe network have studied and documented imperiled plants, animals, and ecosystems, amassing more than 500,000 detailed locational records of these species and places. Although these data are widely used by government, conservation groups, and the private sector to inform conservation and environmental management, no comprehensive gateway yet exists to access these data via the Internet. NatureServe's new project aims to create just such a gateway by electronically confederating the existing distributed network of biodiversity databases held by the natural heritage programs in each of the 50 states.

“Understanding the precise bounds of rare and endangered species populations is essential for effective conservation and for basic research,” said Dr. Bruce A. Stein, Vice President of Programs for NatureServe and principal investigator for the project. “This NSF support will allow us to ensure that these valuable data are widely accessible and able to fulfill that promise.”

By providing open access for the research community to large amounts of previously inaccessible data on the status and distribution of species populations and ecological communities, the project will create new opportunities for data exploration, analysis, and synthesis. New applications of these data will help advance scientific understanding of fundamental patterns of the nation's biodiversity.

NatureServe will collaborate on the project with computer experts from the University of Massachusetts-Boston to design and implement the technical architecture and software components, and to improve interoperability of the NatureServe network with other biodiversity informatics initiatives. The project builds on work already carried out by NatureServe and others

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in developing and implementing a robust biodiversity data model, creating technological tools for data management and data publishing, and addressing key institutional and intellectual property rights issues.

The expected amount of the grant, which was effective May 15, 2004, is for a total of \$1,082,470 over three years. The grant is provided by the National Science Foundation's Biological Databases and Informatics program (award #DBI-0345400). Titled "Developing a New Infrastructure for Dynamic Access to Multi-institutional Biodiversity Data," the project is directed by Dr. Bruce A. Stein, Larry Sugarbaker, and Mary Klein of NatureServe, in partnership with Dr. Robert A. Morris of the University of Massachusetts-Boston.

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NatureServe is a non-profit conservation group dedicated to providing the scientific information and technology 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.