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**PRESS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **NatureServe to Coordinate Five-Year Study on Decline of Tropical Amphibian Populations**

*Arlington, Virginia* — NatureServe will coordinate an international group of tropical scientists to conduct the most comprehensive assessment ever of the causes of decline in the populations of frogs, salamanders, and other amphibians in Central and South America and the Caribbean.

The National Science Foundation has awarded NatureServe a five-year, \$500,000 grant for the project, titled “Coordinated Research on Amphibian Population Declines in the Neotropics.” The project is led by Bruce Young, Ph.D., international zoologist for NatureServe, and began with a meeting of regional experts held May 24-27 in Costa Rica.

“This project holds great promise for helping to unlock the ongoing mystery of declining and disappearing amphibian populations,” said Mark Schaefer, NatureServe’s president and CEO. “The National Science Foundation’s investment in this research will help focus attention on amphibian decline as a critical conservation issue.”

Recent research has documented dramatic population declines and extinctions of frogs, toads, and salamanders in many parts of the New World tropics, a pattern also seen in North America and elsewhere in the world. NatureServe and its partners propose to form a research network to be called RANA—the Research and Analysis network for Neotropical Amphibians. RANA will coordinate scientists from many institutions, including universities, museums, and non-governmental organizations, researching this issue. The project’s goal is to develop a scientific basis for conservation action by promoting collaborative research and sharing of results, and by encouraging ongoing monitoring of key sites in order to better understand the extent and causes of amphibian declines.

Reports of extinctions, deformities, and population declines in amphibians appear often in the popular media, and represent a modern day mystery to scientists. Despite media attention to this issue, scientific research is underfunded and the causes of these events remain elusive. Latin America, for example, is home to about half of the Earth’s approximately 4,700 known amphibian species. Yet due to the vast size of the region, its diversity of habitats, and the paucity of field study in many countries, scientists believe that hundreds of Latin American amphibians have yet to be discovered or described.

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The causes of global amphibian declines are also not clearly known, although leading hypotheses include habitat loss, disease, climate change, and UV-B radiation. The global nature of the declines means that U.S. scientists must look beyond national borders to gain insights on why large numbers of frogs are disappearing in many regions of the United States, including the Sierra Nevadas and the Cascade Mountains of the West Coast.

The development of RANA (also the Spanish word for frog) represents a major step forward in applying conservation resources to this critical issue. RANA will report its findings to the public through a bilingual Spanish-English website about amphibian declines and through a database on the status of all species of the New World tropics, developed in collaboration with the World Conservation Union's (IUCN) Species Survival Commission.

RANA builds upon an initial survey of the state of scientific knowledge of this issue gained from workshops with Latin American herpetologists and conservationists held in November 1999 in Mexico, Panama, and Ecuador. The report from those workshops documented widespread amphibian declines in at least 13 Latin American countries, and compiled more than 50 cases of species thought to be either globally extinct or extirpated from a country where they once occurred.

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NatureServe is a non-profit conservation organization dedicated to providing scientific information that forms the basis for effective conservation action. NatureServe represents a network of 75 natural heritage programs and conservation data centers in the United States, Canada, Latin America, and the Caribbean that assess the condition and distribution of plants, animals, and ecosystems. NatureServe and its member programs are the leading source for detailed scientific information on rare and endangered species and threatened ecosystems. Visit us on the web at [www.natureserve.org](http://www.natureserve.org).