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NatureServe Vista Version 1.3 Provides New Tools for Evaluating Land Use Plans

Arlington, Virginia — NatureServe today released version 1.3 of NatureServe Vista, a custom GIS software application that helps land use planners, resource managers, and local communities to better integrate biodiversity information into their land use and conservation planning efforts. NatureServe Vista 1.3 includes enhanced capabilities that help users to evaluate the impact of proposed land-use plans and generate alternate plans that better meet conservation goals.

“We believe that NatureServe Vista is a valuable tool for conservation and land use planning,” said Larry Sugarbaker, NatureServe’s Chief Information Officer. “Using this software, planners can create plans that reflect their own situation and priorities, effectively document the planning process, enhance the consistency and repeatability of their efforts, and manage projects through their complete lifecycle, including analysis, planning, implementation, and monitoring.”

NatureServe Vista 1.3 allows land use planners and resource managers to integrate information on biodiversity, land cover, natural resource management practices, and land-use patterns and policies into a single decision-making process. Specifically, organizations can use NatureServe Vista to:

- identify the plants, animals, and habitats that they wish to conserve, using high-quality scientific data from NatureServe, natural heritage programs, and other sources, and map the places where they are found.
- summarize the conservation value of a particular place, using a weighting system that reflects user priorities, and identify the most ecologically sensitive areas to be conserved, along with those places where development presents fewer conflicts.
- generate a set of proposed conservation sites that meet agreed-upon conservation goals.
- evaluate how well various land use or resource management plans meet these conservation goals. For example, users can assess the positive or negative implications for the environment of competing land-use scenarios, such as different routes for highways or housing developments.
- develop and implement land use and resource management plans, and monitor the progress of these plans over time.

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NatureServe Vista version 1.3 introduces a module called Site Explorer, a powerful tool that allows users to identify and understand the species and habitats that contribute to the conservation value of a particular site or set of sites, the land use and policies associated with those sites, and the response of the identified species and habitats to those land uses and policies. Site Explorer also provides the ability to conduct site-level “what if” inquiries that help to evaluate the effect of land use or policy changes on the achievement of conservation goals. Exploring these different scenarios, users can test alternative land use plans and policies for a given site, eventually finding the scenario that best fits their conservation goals.

Another new feature of version 1.3 is interoperability with two popular conservation planning tools, MARXAN and SPOT, commonly used by conservation experts around the world. NatureServe Vista greatly eases the process of developing the data inputs required to run these tools, and then imports the resulting scenarios back into Vista.

NatureServe Vista is a custom desktop GIS application designed an extension of ESRI’s ArcMap platform with Spatial Analyst. The software is supported by a network of experts who can help users apply its features to real-world land use and conservation decisions.

NatureServe Vista is the product of a multi-year science and software development effort led by NatureServe, undertaken with generous lead support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. Partners in the development of NatureServe Vista include the UC Santa Barbara Biogeography Laboratory, U.S. Geological Survey, Wyoming Natural Diversity Database, Florida Natural Areas Inventory, and ESRI. Users can learn more by visiting the NatureServe Vista website at www.natureserve.org/vista, where they can download a product brochure, review case studies, and download a 60-day free trial.

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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.