



Press Release

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For Immediate Release

Development of National Conservation Easement Database Underway Multi-Partner Initiative Will Track and Map Voluntarily-Protected Easement Lands

Arlington, Virginia — Five leading conservation organizations, including NatureServe, have launched an initiative to develop the first national database of conservation easement data. The goal is to create a single, up-to-date, sustainable nationwide system for managing and accessing data about conservation easements, which ensure long-term protection of privately-owned lands.

“Nearly a decade into the technology-driven 21st century, there remains no single source of information on private lands that have been voluntarily protected for future generations of Americans,” said Carlton Owen, president of the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, the principal funder of the initiative. “We’ve been working with a range of cooperators in resource agencies and the conservation community to determine what is needed and how to fill the void.”

Conservation easements are legal agreements voluntarily entered into between landowners and conservation entities (agencies or land trusts) for the express purpose of protecting societal values such as open space or vital wildlife habitats. When completed, the National Conservation Easement Database (NCED) will provide the first comprehensive picture of the estimated 40 million acres of privately-owned conservation easement lands in the United States, recognizing the important contribution they make to America’s natural heritage, a vibrant economy, and healthy communities. Designed to be voluntary and secure, the NCED will respect landowner privacy, and will not collect landowner names or sensitive information.

The NCED project team, comprising the Conservation Biology Institute, Defenders of Wildlife, Ducks Unlimited, NatureServe and the Trust for Public Land, will collaborate with land trusts and public agencies to create a user-friendly, highly interactive web-based system for uploading and viewing easement data. Maps, statistics, and reports from the database will support sound planning and policy-making for conservation, natural resource management, and development.

“We’re excited to be partnering with these outstanding organizations on NCED,” said Mary Klein, President and CEO of NatureServe. “Reliable data about what lands are protected is essential to good planning for conservation or development, and that’s what this project will provide.”

Key partners providing support, advice, and data to the NCED include the Land Trust Alliance, representing the views of the nation’s 1,700+ land trusts, The Nature Conservancy, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the U.S. Forest Service.

“We think creation of the national database will serve everyone’s interests and needs,” said Rand Wentworth, President of the Land Trust Alliance. “Many of our members operate only with volunteers and have very limited access to technology and planning tools. This database, which will use state-of-the-art technology, will offer a new dimension never before available to local conservationists and planners.”

The NCED will be closely coordinated with a related conservation mapping effort, the Protected Areas Database of the U.S. (www.protectedlands.net) to ensure that the data sets can be combined to provide a complete view of U.S. protected areas. NCED data will be published on several conservation websites, including LandScope America (www.landscape.org).

The NCED is an initiative of the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, with additional financial support provided by the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelly Foundation. The Endowment’s Board recently approved a \$1,000,000 investment to create the NCED. The initial database, representing all 50 states, is planned to be available in late 2011.

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NatureServe is a non-profit conservation group dedicated to providing the scientific basis for effective conservation action. Representing a network of 82 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.

The U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities is a not-for-profit public charity working collaboratively with partners in the public and private sectors to advance systemic, transformative and sustainable change for the health and vitality of the nation’s working forests and forest-reliant communities. See www.usendowment.org. For more information, contact Carlton Owen, President & CEO, U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, 864-233-7646, carlton@usendowment.org.