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**NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PARTNERS WITH OREGON AND WASHINGTON
TO LAUNCH GEOTOURISM PROJECT FOR CENTRAL CASCADES**
MapGuide to Tell Region's Authentic Story

WASHINGTON (Jan. 14, 2009)—National Geographic Society's Center for Sustainable Destinations has joined organizations in Washington and Oregon to recognize and celebrate the world-class natural attractions of the Central Cascades. The pilot project seeks to contribute to the economic health of communities by promoting sustainable tourism.

A community-based nomination process launched today will be used to create a National Geographic "Geotourism MapGuide" for the region. The "Central Cascades" area designated by National Geographic stretches from Mount Rainier National Park to Crater Lake National Park, including communities plus private and public lands in both states. The printed Central Cascades MapGuide will be available in September 2009. An interactive Web site paralleling and expanding the printed guide is also being developed.

"From Mount Rainier to Crater Lake, the spectacular beauty and abundant recreational opportunities of the Central Cascades are unique," said James Dion, associate director, National Geographic's Center for Sustainable Destinations. "National Geographic is pleased to have the opportunity to spotlight this region and, in doing so, support and sustain it as one of the treasured natural places on the globe."

Local residents and visitors are invited to nominate for inclusion in the MapGuide the unique landmarks, attractions, activities, events and local businesses that define the region's character and distinctive appeal. Nominations may be made through March 29, 2009, at www.thecentralscades.com. The site nomination process was opened today at a reception in Portland, where Dion officially announced the Central Cascades Geotourism Initiative and asked for public participation.

Public forums and presentations will be conducted in communities throughout the Central Cascades to encourage nominations and community involvement.

"Because those who live and recreate here know it best, participation by local residents is critical to the project's success," said Todd Davidson, CEO of Travel Oregon. "Our goal is to get nominations from across the region that identify the things people love best about the Cascades; those 'gotta see, gotta go' places we are most enthusiastic to share with visitors."

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Beyond open-to-the-public map point nomination, the MapGuide development process calls for oversight by a regional committee. The Central Cascades Stewardship Council was formed and met for the first time in Stevenson, Wash., on Dec. 4, 2008. It represents an assortment of geotourism perspectives including community leadership, historic preservation, natural resources, public lands management, indigenous peoples, traditional and local arts, agriculture, tourism promotion and local businesses.

“An inherent benefit of geotourism is connecting diverse interests under a common goal,” continued Dion. “The design of the MapGuide process, specifically in forming a regional stewardship council, encourages and builds mutually beneficial partnerships.”

A primary task for the Stewardship Council will be to review and sort nomination submissions prior to sending them to National Geographic. National Geographic will have final say on the selected sites, an estimated total of 150 map points.

Washington and Oregon both seek to grow rural tourism under their economic development strategies. They also acknowledge the sensitive balance between growth and conservation, particularly in the Central Cascades region. Both states look to identify and develop product that would be attractive to a “geotourist” as a means to achieve balanced economic growth.

“Stimulating economic growth in the Central Cascades by encouraging geotourism efforts is a win-win,” explained Marsha Massey, executive director, Washington State Tourism. “The potential for the region to be sought out for its intrinsic assets is tremendous.”

According to a 2002 study by National Geographic Traveler magazine and the U.S. Travel Association, more than 55 million adults in the United States could be described as “geotourists,” who travel to enjoy the distinctive character of places and are willing to help sustain and enhance those qualities for future visitors. These travelers control more than half the household income of all U.S. travelers.

Additional perceived benefits of the MapGuide include calling forth the themes that are important to conserving the gems of the region; laying the groundwork for future collaboration of individual, business, community and conservation interests; building pride in the region and its communities; and inspiring stewardship of the region.

The National Geographic Society Center for Sustainable Destinations is providing overall project direction under Jonathan Tourtellot, the center’s director, and James Dion; National Geographic Maps, led by chief cartographer Allen Carroll, will handle cartography.

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Coordinating this geotourism initiative in Washington and Oregon are the Central Cascades Project Advisory Committee, a coalition of Travel Oregon, Washington State Tourism, Sustainable Travel International, Rural Development Initiatives, Sustainable Northwest, the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. Significant funding and regional leadership are being provided by Travel Oregon, Washington State Tourism, USDA Forest Service/National Forest Scenic Byways Transportation and Tourism Planning, USDI Bureau of Land Management, Oregon Cultural Trust, Clackamas County Tourism Development Council, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Central Oregon Visitors Association, Convention and Visitors Association of Lane County Oregon, Portland Metro and the Columbia River Gorge Visitors Association.

The National Geographic Society has worked with community-based alliances to develop similar "Geotourism MapGuides" in several other regions around the world. MapGuide projects have been completed or are ongoing in Greater Yellowstone, the Crown of the Continent (Alberta, British Columbia, Montana), Guatemala, Sonoran Desert (Arizona, Sonora), Romania, Norway, Honduras, Peru, Baja California, Rhode Island, Vermont and Appalachia.

The National Geographic Society is one of the world's largest nonprofit scientific and educational organizations. Founded in 1888 to "increase and diffuse geographic knowledge," the Society works to inspire people to care about the planet. It reaches more than 325 million people worldwide each month through its official journal, National Geographic, and other magazines; National Geographic Channel; television documentaries; music; radio; films; books; DVDs; maps; exhibitions; school publishing programs; interactive media; and merchandise. National Geographic has funded more than 9,000 scientific research, conservation and exploration projects and supports an education program combating geographic illiteracy. For more information, visit nationalgeographic.com.

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