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Media Contacts:

Bradley Cleveland, 510.967.1066, sierrageotourism@sbcouncil.org

Nicole DeJonghe, 530.582.4800, ndejonghe@sbcouncil.org

Shana Avalos, Outreach and Partnership Program Coordinator, Sierra Nevada Conservancy, savalos@sierranevada.ca.gov

New National Geographic MapGuide to Highlight Sierra Nevada Region
Web site to highlight authentic places in vast scenic area

WHAT: Press Conference to announce the Geotourism Web site

WHERE: Mariposa Museum and History Center, Mariposa, CA

WHEN: Wednesday, August 19, 2009, 10 to 11:30 am

The National Geographic Society has partnered with the Sierra Nevada Conservancy and Sierra Business Council to capture the history and heritage of the Sierra Nevada Region in order to create an interactive Web site and print map. The Sierra Nevada Geotourism Project seeks to celebrate the Sierra Nevada as a world-class destination, while contributing to the economic health of the region by promoting sustainable tourism. History buffs and adventurers, backpackers and foodies, birders and sightseers can discover unique destinations based on recommendations from those who know best — residents of the Sierra Nevada.

Sierra residents and visitors, community organizations, tourism stakeholders and local businesses will nominate sites for potential inclusion in a print MapGuide and interactive Web site. Unlike any other mapping project, a favorite local restaurant, farm, winery, hiking or biking trail, swimming hole, museum or artist gallery are samples of the type of nominations National Geographic and its project partners will be seeking. The Web site will target a variety of growing travel niches — adventure and nature tourism, cultural heritage travel and agritourism – and allow for residents to select the one-of-a-kind places integral to a distinctive character of place.

“The breadth of the beauty in the Sierra Nevada is tremendously unique. Lassen National Park, Lake Tahoe, Yosemite National Park, and Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks are incredible jewels in this 400-mile-long region,” said Steve Frisch, President, Sierra Business Council.

“The Sierra Nevada Geotourism Project is the perfect synthesis between economic outreach to culturally rich communities and respect for the planet,” he added.

(OVER)

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Geotourism is defined as tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place — its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage and the well-being of its residents. Geotourism helps travelers to tread lightly and enjoy a locale's sense of place.

“An inherent benefit of geotourism is connecting diverse interests under a common goal,” said Jim Dion, Associate Director of National Geographic Society's Center for Sustainable Destinations. “The design of the MapGuide process, specifically in forming a regional stewardship council, encourages and builds mutually beneficial partnerships.”

A Geotourism Council will oversee the Sierra Nevada Geotourism Project. Working with the National Geographic Society, the Geo Council will:

1. Encourage community participation in the collection of nominations for the geotourism Web site and MapGuide during the three-month nomination period.
2. Review the nominations and identify themes for the project; work with National Geographic on the writing, editing, fact-checking and design of the Web site and print MapGuide.
3. Develop a marketing plan for the site; oversee the MapGuide's distribution and contribute fresh material to the Web site; and encourage long-term stewardship of the Sierra's natural, historic and cultural assets.

Nominations begin in the Yosemite Gateway region at the August 19 press event, with the initial Web site slated to launch January 2010 and completion of the Web site covering the entire range slated for November 2010.

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 in Greater Yellowstone, the Central Cascades (Oregon, Washington), the Crown of the Continent (Alberta, British Columbia, Montana), Guatemala, Montreal, 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 370 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; live events; 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 promoting geographic literacy. For more information, visit nationalgeographic.com.

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Members of the press from around the region are encouraged to join this launch in Mariposa, CA, on Wednesday, August 19, 2009, and visit the Sierra Nevada Geotourism Media Kit at www.sbcouncil.org/geotourismmediakit. Please note that the Mariposa Museum and History center will be offering complimentary admission to all visitors that day.

Speakers include:

- James Dion, Associate Director of National Geographic's Center for Sustainable Destinations, jdion@ngs.org
- Ron Loya, President of the Mariposa Museum and History Center Board of Directors, 209-966-2924
- Brad Aborn, Mariposa County Board of Supervisors Chair, baborn@mariposacounty.org
- Nicole DeJonghe, Sierra Business Council, ndejonghe@sbccouncil.org
- Bob Kingman, Sierra Nevada Conservancy, bkingman@sierranevada.ca.gov

The Sierra Nevada Geotourism project is being advanced with the support of the National Park Service, the United States Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management and the California Department of Parks and Recreation.

