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Collaborative Stewardship Resources Now Available at www.WestCANhelp.org

Missoula and Bozeman, MT—March 15, 2007— The Sonoran Institute and the National Forest Foundation announce the unveiling of the Western Collaboration Assistance Network (WestCAN), with an online resource library at www.WestCANhelp.org and personalized assistance through a toll-free information line.

Collaboration is increasingly used to find common ground around public lands issues in the West. After decades of controversy and clashes, this is tough work. WestCAN seeks to broaden the community of people working together on complex natural resource issues. WestCAN works to prevent repetition of common mistakes and to coordinate opportunities for people to connect with others who have successfully overcome the many challenges of collaboration.

www.WestCANhelp.org

The Web site provides easy access to hundreds of documents that offer tools, guides, research, lessons learned and best practices to help community members and federal agencies involved in collaboration on public lands issues.

“We have gathered the most useful resources we could find, and organized them all in one place to make it easy for collaborative groups to find the information they’re looking for,” said Whitney Tilt of the Sonoran Institute. “We are grateful to the dozens of organizations and individuals who shared their knowledge to make the WestCAN resource library a reality.”

Free Technical Assistance to Collaborative Stewardship Groups

In addition to the online resource library, WestCAN offers free information and referrals to public agency employees and community organizations working collaboratively on stewardship of public lands in the western United States. WestCAN offers “nuts and bolts” technical assistance and links people through a peer-to-peer network. WestCAN is built on the premise of providing personal attention and talking through issues to identify the specific help needed.

“This is a tremendous opportunity to facilitate community collaboration,” said Gail Kimbell, Chief of the U.S. Forest Service. “This approach is working well in a number of forest communities.” The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management are WestCAN partners.

NEW RESOURCE FOR COLLABORATION
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Since WestCAN started operating in late 2006, nonprofit requests have included information about how to strengthen their boards of directors, manage volunteers, and put together multiparty monitoring programs. Agency staff requests have included examples of successful collaborative efforts in other parts of the country, and guidance on how to set up groups with diverse stakeholders to reduce conflict over on-the-ground projects.

To request assistance, call the toll free line at 866-773-4633 ext. 13, 406-542-2805 ext 13, or email kdibari@natlforests.org. WestCAN can also connect you with a peer who has direct experience with the issue you are facing. WestCAN is not a source of grant funds, however, we can help identify potential funders of collaborative work on various topics.

WestCAN services are offered through a partnership among the Sonoran Institute, the National Forest Foundation, the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. WestCAN is supported by the Flora Family Foundation, the Ford Foundation, Meyer Memorial Trust, the Surdna Foundation, the Rose E. Tucker Charitable Trust and the Virginia Wellington Cabot Foundation.

About National Forest Foundation

The National Forest Foundation (NFF), chartered by Congress, engages America in community-based and national programs that promote the health and public enjoyment of the 193-million-acre National Forest System, and administers private gifts of funds and land for the benefit of the National Forests. The NFF is committed to facilitating local involvement and encouraging grassroots participation in forest stewardship. To learn more about the National Forest Foundation, please visit www.natlforests.org; for information on recreation and volunteer opportunities on our National Forests and joining *Friends of the Forest*®, visit www.becomeafriend.org.

About Sonoran Institute

The Sonoran Institute is dedicated to inspiring and enabling community decisions and public policies that respect the land and people of western North America. Through civil dialogue, collaboration, and applied knowledge, we work toward a shared community vision of lasting conservation and prosperity. Sonoran's Resources for Community Collaboration program supports community-based collaborations working to resolve conflicts over use of natural resources in the rural West. Find out more by visiting www.sonoran.org.