



PRESS RELEASE

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DORIS DUKE
CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

Environment Program

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Grant Launches Research Program To Strengthen Wildlife Habitat Protection

New York, NY – The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation announced today a four-year, \$3,338,334 grant to the National Council for Science and the Environment (NCSE) to launch a major new research program focused on strengthening policies and approaches to protect wildlife habitat in the United States.

Called the Wildlife Habitat Policy Research Program (WHPRP), this new initiative will provide grants of between \$25,000 and \$200,000 to researchers conducting policy-relevant research on key issues affecting wildlife habitat conservation. Reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of the conservation challenge, the program will support research in the natural sciences, as well as law, economics, social sciences and public policy.

These research grants, competitively awarded and peer-reviewed, will be administered by the NCSE, a nonprofit organization established in 1990 to improve the scientific basis for environmental decision-making.

“When it comes to protecting wildlife habitat, there are so many things that we don’t know,” said Dr. Joan Spero, president of DDCF. “How much land is set aside for conservation right now? How much land do we need to conserve to protect all of the nation’s species? What are the relative costs and benefits of habitat protection? How do we improve the incentives for conserving habitat? These are just a few of the questions that need good answers if we want to preserve the flora and fauna of the United States for future generations.”

The WHPRP is modeled on the National Commission on Science for Sustainable Forestry, created by NCSE in 2001 and funded in part by DDCF. Drawing on this experience in bringing together diverse stakeholder groups to span the divide between policy and science, NCSE will oversee a similar process focused on wildlife habitat issues.

The first step includes a survey and workshop representing the full spectrum of stakeholders – conservationists, scientists, business leaders, and government officials. This group will help identify and prioritize options for the program’s research agenda. An ongoing Program Committee will then be established to help guide the program, prepare Requests for Proposals, and oversee the selection and performance of grantees.

To ensure the integrity of the research itself, the American Institute of Biological Sciences will manage an external peer-review process for all WHPRP grants.

“On contentious issues like habitat protection, research is one way to raise the ratio between light and heat,” said Dr. Chris Bernabo, the program’s director. “Reasonable people may argue about the best policy, but they can agree about the data and information needed to make good decisions. That’s what we’re striving for.”

Bernabo noted that WHPRP grants would address a wide range of policy-relevant research topics, and not just questions of conservation biology. “Some of the grants, certainly, will support biological sciences,” he said. “But equally if not more important, we will also fund projects aimed at synthesis of existing research, assessing the applications of knowledge for improving decision making, and the creation of new conservation tools.”

As conceived, the program will award three rounds of grants, starting in the fall of 2006. The grant competitions will be open to all researchers. The program also includes an outreach component, with the results of the research to be posted on a dedicated website and disseminated widely to policymakers and other target audiences. Researchers will also be encouraged to publish their results in peer-reviewed journals.

“This initiative directly complements the foundation’s ongoing efforts to accelerate the protection of wildlife habitat,” commented Dr. Mark Shaffer, DDCF’s Program Director for the Environment. “The knowledge and insights generated by these research projects should prove very helpful in identifying the means to protect critical lands.”

The mission of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation (www.ddcf.org) is to improve the quality of people’s lives through grants supporting the performing arts, wildlife conservation, medical research and the prevention of child maltreatment, and through preservation of the cultural and environmental legacy of Doris Duke’s properties.

The mission of the National Council for Science and the Environment (www.ncseonline.org) is to improve the scientific basis for environmental decision-making.