



**NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC JOINS CALIFORNIA PARTNERS, BLM
TO LAUNCH GEOTOURISM PROJECT FOR STATE'S NORTH COAST**
Online MapGuide to Tell Region's Authentic Story

FORT BRAGG, Calif. (May 4, 2009)—National Geographic Society's Center for Sustainable Destinations (CSD) has joined the North Coast Tourism Council, local communities and the Bureau of Land Management to spotlight the world-class natural attractions of the California North Coast. The pilot project, which will launch with the creation of an innovative online map, seeks to contribute to the economic health of communities by promoting geotourism: tourism that sustains and enhances the geographical character of a place — its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage and the well-being of its residents.

Local communities and individuals have one month to nominate their favorite geotourism attractions for inclusion in the National Geographic Geotourism MapGuide for the North Coast region, which stretches from West Marin to Del Norte counties and includes private and public lands. Nominations for landmarks, attractions, activities, events and local businesses that best define the region's character and distinctive appeal may be made through May 31, 2009, at www.northcoastgeotourism.com. The Web-based North Coast MapGuide, to be created by National Geographic's cartographers, will be available in November 2009.

"From Point Reyes to the state and national redwoods parks, the spectacular beauty and abundant recreational opportunities of the North Coast are vast," said James Dion, associate director of the CSD. "The MapGuide will celebrate the area's scenic, cultural and historical attributes from the unique vantage point of those who live there."

Public forums and presentations have been conducted in communities throughout the North Coast 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 Scott Schneider, chair, North Coast Tourism Council. "Our goal is to get nominations from across the region that identify the things people love best — the 'don't miss' places that inevitably become return visits."

Beyond open-to-the-public map point nominations, the MapGuide development process calls for oversight by a regional committee. The North Coast Geotourism Committee, which met for the first time Dec. 2, 2008, 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.

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“An inherent benefit of geotourism is connecting diverse interests under a common goal,” said 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 Geotourism Committee will be to review and sort map nomination submissions prior to sending them to National Geographic, which will have final say on the selected sites and themes for the online MapGuide.

“California is very interested in supporting sustainable rural tourism under its economic development strategies,” noted Richard Strom, director of special projects, Mendocino County Promotional Alliance. “The state also acknowledges the sensitive balance between growth and conservation, particularly in the North Coast region. Geotourists tend to spend more money, stay longer and leave a softer footprint.”

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.

The CSD is providing project direction under Jonathan Tourtellot, the center’s director, and James Dion; National Geographic Maps chief cartographer Allen Carroll will head mapping.

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 Central Cascades (Oregon, Washington), 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 360 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 combating geographic illiteracy. For more information, visit nationalgeographic.com.

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CONTACTS:

Marcia deChadenedes
Outreach & Partnership Coordinator
California Coastal National Monument
Marcia_deChadenedes@blm.gov
(831) 372-6225

Richard Strom
Director of Special Projects
Mendocino County Promotional Alliance
rstrom@mcn.org
(707) 964-9010

Barbara Fallon
National Geographic Society
Center for Sustainable Destinations
Bfallon.nationalgeographic@gmail.com
(703) 489-0880