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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
September 29, 2017

## MAJOR CONFERENCE OF NATURAL AREAS PROFESSIONALS COMES TO FORT COLLINS

The Natural Areas Conference brings together leaders in conservation and resource management for three-day event in October 2017

**Fort Collins, CO**—The biggest gathering of members and friends of the Natural Areas Association – the only national, non-profit membership organization that is dedicated to the support and advancement of the community of natural areas professionals – will convene in Fort Collins in two weeks' time. The annual Natural Areas Conference will take place at the Hilton Fort Collins on October 10-12, 2017.

The keynote presentation will be **Rocky Mountain National Park Superintendent Darla Sidles** on the record-breaking visitor traffic impacting national parks.

The event will focus on the ways natural areas and resource management professionals can collaborate with fellow professionals, for- and non-profits, governmental organizations and other groups to better respond to challenges such as a changing climate, invasive species and habitat loss. This year's conference theme is *Working beyond boundaries: Collaboration as a key to natural areas management*.

The three-day conference will feature both an Opening and Closing plenary session, along with organized sessions, symposia, poster presentations, workshops and instructional field trips to nearby natural areas.

The plenary session on Tuesday, October 10 will include the keynote address by Superintendent Sidles, as well as presentations that cover the Mountains to Plains initiative as a case study and how a range of tools rooted in social science can help natural areas managers

build consensus across diverse stakeholder groups. The opening plenary will conclude with a presentation of Colorado's natural history and natural areas.

On Wednesday, October 11, the closing plenary will include presentations and an interactive panel discussion on Managing Smaller Natural Areas: Case Studies on the Role they Play in Protection, moderated by Wilderness Society Senior Science Director Greg Aplet.

Other themes the conference will explore include Restoration in the Anthropocene, Pollinator Conservation, Native Seed, Urban Conservation, Invasive Species Management, Fire, Technology for Land Management, and Communicating about Natural Areas Conservation.

Natural Areas Association Executive Director Lisa Smith points out that Fort Collins is the perfect setting for a conference that emphasizes the importance of collaboration in land management. "There are so many natural areas in this part of Colorado that exemplify the best principles of land management," she says. "We're excited to bring the 44<sup>th</sup> Natural Areas Conference here, so that our attendees can benefit from learning about these successful strategies for collaboration in preserving the lands that are so important to us."

She adds that with so many challenges facing natural areas professionals, the conference offers a much-needed opportunity for them to learn about new advances in the field, share their experiences, and especially, re-connect with the entire natural areas community.

"It's critical that we bring this community together to face all the challenges of conservation and land management—but it's just as important that we take time, together, to celebrate our successes," she says.

The Natural Areas Association presents its **George B. Fell** and **Carl N. Becker Awards** during the **Awards Dinner** Wednesday, October 11, to individuals and organizations that have made exceptional contributions to natural areas stewardship. This year's Becker Award goes to Bill Kleiman, the project director for The Nature Conservancy's Nachusa Grasslands in north-central Illinois. The Fell Award, the Natural Areas Association's highest award, will go to Larry Smith, retired from the Virginia Natural Heritage Program.

For more information about the 2017 Natural Areas Conference, go to <http://naturalareasconference.org/> Access a video about the conference at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=falPWQ6kJQQ&t=12s> or the Natural Areas Association channel on YouTube.

**About the Natural Areas Association:** We are the only national, non-profit membership organization that is dedicated to the support and advancement of the community of natural areas professionals. Our members work to protect and restore natural areas, ecosystems and landscapes, and include natural lands managers, natural resource managers, land trust staff and volunteers, biologists, ecologists, researchers, policy specialists, educators, students, and anyone with an active interest in environmental conservation and natural areas stewardship. For more information, go to <https://www.naturalareas.org/>

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