

**News Release for Immediate Release
From Northeast Kingdom Travel and Tourism Association**

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National Geographic Launches Geotourism Program in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom

The three counties of Vermont's Northeast Kingdom—Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans—have become the latest participants in the geotourism program conducted by the National Geographic Society's Center for Sustainable Destinations (CSD). Working with the Nulhegan Gateway Association (NGA) and the University of Vermont, National Geographic will feature the Northeast Kingdom in a Geotourism MapGuide. Jonathan Tourtellot, CSD director, defines geotourism as "tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place—its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents."

Area communities will participate in proposing environmental, cultural, and historical sites and visitor experiences for inclusion on the map, a process that raises local awareness of the region's assets. Geotourism is all about "sense of place," so entries collected from Northeast Kingdom residents will reflect sustainable qualities and characteristics unique to the area. Any resident or visitor is welcome to submit nomination forms for entities to be included on the map. Nomination forms can be obtained from www.travelthekingdom.com or calling the Northeast Kingdom Travel and Tourism office at (802) 626-8511.

CSD will assist in vetting submissions from communities across the three counties, then relaying the selections to National Geographic Maps, which will prepare the MapGuide with some 40 annotated geotourism points of interest. Both print and online versions are planned. Funding for this program was provided through a Rural Business Enterprise Grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, and the Vermont Community Foundation. Special thanks to the University of Vermont Extension Service and the Northeast Kingdom Travel and Tourism Association for its generous support of the NEK Geotourism Program. "Partnerships and collaborative approaches have helped make this vision a reality," said Jolinda LaClair, State Director of USDA Rural Development in VT.

In development for nearly a year, the project officially launched this March. The NGA has already convened a variety of local organizations to begin forming a permanent geotourism stewardship council to continue serving the region after completion of the MapGuide. In coordination with its local partners, which include over 20 local organizations representing stakeholders from agriculture to education, NGA also plans to develop a Geotourism Business Network, a Geotourism Hero's program, and a series of educational workshops. A photography project to launch in April will involve local photographers and feature images that present "the soul" of the Northeast Kingdom.

In launching this effort, the Northeast Kingdom region joins Norway, Honduras, Appalachia, Romania, and the Arizona-Sonora in advancing the goals of community-

driven sustainable development. It is hoped this project will serve as a model for expansion and replication to other regions. For more information, see the Center for Sustainable Destinations website <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable>.