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NATIONAL CONSERVATION FUND GIVES GREEN THUMBS-UP TO SOUTH FLORIDA'S FAIRCHILD CHALLENGE, ENDORSES PROGRAM AS MODEL FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION WORLDWIDE

CORAL GABLES, FL – Jan. 7, 2009 – The National Forum on Children and Nature (NFCN) recently gave a green thumbs-up to the Fairchild Challenge, a South Florida-based environmental education and conservation program credited for leading a green revolution in schools nationwide. The NFCN, a high-profile campaign of the prestigious Conservation Fund, recognized the Fairchild Challenge, a seven-year-old education outreach program, as a worldwide model for connecting youth with the environment in new and creative ways.

The 54-member NFCN, which brings together a diverse, high-powered group of leaders from public and private sectors (including state governors, city mayors and corporate CEO's, as well as distinguished educators, park officials and others), selected the Fairchild Challenge from among 560 competing projects. Based on relevance, impact and sustainability, the endorsement (also bestowed this year on 29 other organizations) honors the very best programs for their investment in children's health through nature, particularly in the areas of education, technology and community.

"The National Forum on Children and Nature proudly endorses the Fairchild Challenge for its vision, creativity and commitment to the well-being of future generations," said Larry Selzer, the Conservation Fund's president and chief executive officer.

Added Caroline Lewis, director of education, who oversees the Fairchild Challenge: "This seal of approval from such a distinguished body as the National Forum on Children and Nature is a tremendous honor for us. It will help us play an even greater role in the national conversation about effectively weaving attention to nature into the daily lives of teenagers everywhere."

The Fairchild Challenge's open-ended, environmentally based interdisciplinary program is provided free to middle and high schools every academic year and split into two separate but similar Challenges for grades six through eight and grades nine through twelve. Designed by specialists at South Florida's world-renowned Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, the Fairchild Challenge comprises a series of individual projects, contests and performances in which students can choose to participate. These Challenge options include: writing opinion and research papers; performing songs and skits; creating gardens, artwork and newsletters; designing solar-powered devices; and formulating "green" cuisine menus. Participation is measured by a point system, with each school aiming to accrue enough points to receive the Fairchild Challenge Award at the annual ceremonies in May. Additional prizes include cash for school environmental projects, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden family passes, backpacks and T-shirts. Participation in the Challenge grew tremendously during the 2007-08 school year, involving more than 40,000 South Florida students and 1,800 teachers from 102 schools.

The Fairchild Challenge appeals to teachers, school officials and community partners as it imaginatively supplements science, civics, language arts and other school disciplines. In its seven years, the program

has helped hundreds of thousands of youths – and through them, their friends, families, and neighbors – become actively engaged citizens and better appreciate the beauty and value of nature.

“Promoting the program through schools maximizes youth involvement and helps young people connect with nature physically, emotionally, intellectually and creatively,” Lewis said. “Long-term, the program will bring about systemic change in standards-based public education and go a long way toward bridging young people's disconnect from nature.”

Lewis, a former science teacher, added: “The Fairchild Challenge can even help combat rising childhood maladies such as obesity and depression by getting kids more closely involved with nature and spending more active time outdoors.”

The Fairchild Challenge is replicable and scalable and has already spread beyond South Florida. Educators from 43 public gardens, museums and zoos have attended Fairchild's satellite training workshops to learn about and implement the Challenge in communities near (Chicago and Utah) and far (Costa Rica and South Africa). To date, eight sites have launched adapted versions of the Fairchild Challenge for their area schools, and several more are in the planning stages. With the Conservation Fund's recent stamp of approval, the program's supporters expect the Fairchild Challenge will spread its green message of hope to teenagers in schools everywhere.

About the Fairchild Challenge

The Fairchild Challenge, established in 2002 by South Florida's 70-year-old Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, seeks to reconnect America's youths with nature through a multi-disciplinary program available free to middle and high schools. Designed to integrate with state curriculum standards, the Fairchild Challenge offers a series of individual projects and contests in which schools may earn points toward prizes awarded at an annual ceremony each May. Staff members at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, one of the world's premier conservation and education-oriented gardens, also train educators from public gardens, museums, zoos and other organizations to establish Fairchild Challenge programs throughout the U.S. and beyond. To learn more, visit www.fairchildchallenge.org or call (305) 667-1651.

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Editor's note: Interviews and photographs are available upon request