

Contact: Phil Powers
Executive Director, American Alpine Club
303-384-0110 x 12
ppowers@americanalpineclub.org

For Immediate Release

The American Alpine Club and The Mountain Institute Receive Grant to Launch “Alpine Conservation Partnership”

Organizations team up to protect and restore alpine ecosystems around the world.

Golden, Colorado, January 19, 2007. The American Alpine Club (AAC) and The Mountain Institute (TMI) announced today a \$150,000 award from the Argosy Foundation to expand conservation success in the Everest region to alpine regions worldwide.

“The Alpine Conservation Partnership is the biggest thing the AAC has ever done in the conservation arena,” said AAC member and Patagonia founder, . In 2004 the two organizations founded the Everest Alpine Conservation and Restoration Project. Although less than three years old, the Everest program has already established the Khumbu Alpine Conservation Council, the world’s first local NGO devoted to the protection of the alpine ecosystem; saved more than 80,000 kg of fragile shrub juniper per year that was formerly used for fuel-wood; established a kerosene and stove depot as alternative fuel for tourists and lodges; restored a porters’ rest house in Lobuche to provide shelter, warmth, and cooking facilities; developed new education curricula for local schools; and is actively restoring de-vegetated hillsides by building high altitude nurseries and cattle-proof demonstration enclosures.

“As frequent visitors to the highest places, climbers are witnesses to the substantial change in snow and glacier cover in recent decades. In the face of climate change and other variables, we want to do our best to protect the places we love,” said Phil Powers, AAC Executive Director.

Covering three percent of the earth’s surface—half the area of tropical rainforests—Alpine ecosystems contain an astonishing 10,000 species of plants; the highest biodiversity per unit area of any ecosystem in the world. They are also critically important as habitat for rare and endangered wildlife (e.g., snow leopard, Argali sheep), medicinal and aromatic plants; as sources of fresh water for drinking, agriculture, and hydropower; and as integral parts of high mountain livelihoods that are increasingly becoming dependant on the adventure tourism trade. However, Alpine ecosystems worldwide are being rapidly degraded as a result of contemporary, unsustainable uses that include unregulated adventure tourism, overgrazing, the cutting of slow-growing shrubs for fuelwood, and over harvesting of valuable medicinal and aromatic plants. Global warming is also impacting these fragile and sensitive ecosystems of highly specialized plants that are adapted to the cold, harsh environments of high altitudes.

The Argosy Foundation’s start-up funding will enable the AAC and TMI to expand the success in the Everest region to other Alpine ecosystems around the world as part of the mission of the Alpine Conservation Partnership. Following detailed project planning in early 2007, the Partnership’s new project sites could include major mountains such as Kilimanjaro and Mt. Kenya (east Africa), Kangchendzonga (Nepal and India), K2 (Pakistan), Huascarán (Peru), and Aconcagua (Chile).

“This partnership with the American Alpine Club is very exciting and important. We expect it to grow into a global collaboration to protect fragile and endangered alpine ecosystems around the world.” said Bob Davis, President and CEO of The Mountain Institute.

The Mountain Institute (www.mountain.org) is an international non-profit organization established in 1972. Its mission is to improve mountain livelihoods, conserve mountain ecosystems, and promote the culture and well-being of mountain people through education and outreach. For 34 years TMI has served mountain people in the remotest regions in the world by helping to identify and respond to their conservation and development priorities. Regional offices and programs are located in the Andes (Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia), Himalayas (Nepal, Tibet Autonomous Region of China, India), Central Asia (Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan), and throughout North America.

The **American Alpine Club** is the premier national organization in the U.S. devoted to the multitude of issues facing rock climbers and mountaineers. For more than 100 years, the AAC has led mountaineering adventure, scientific research and education in the U.S. The Club's active membership ranges from beginning climbers to a "who's who" of the world's most experienced mountaineers. The organization's dedication to education and conservation drives dissemination of knowledge, continued study and scientific exploration of the high mountains of the world, from the Arctic to Antarctic circles. For more information on the AAC, and to learn how to become active in the organization and the sport of climbing, visit the AAC Web site at www.AmericanAlpineClub.org.