FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Yard Futures Project envisions ecological alternatives to lawns; ground-breaking research on cultivating suburban biodiversity now available to all in accessible, online format

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(*Framingham, MA*) Native Plant Trust, the nation's first plant conservation organization and the only one solely focused on New England's native plants, has partnered with the renowned Woodwell Climate Research Center to share ground-breaking research about how American homeowners in six major metropolitan areas currently shape their yards and what can be done to create spaces that work better for both people and the environment. This research and best practices that come out of the Yard Futures Project are now available to the public in brief articles on the Native Plant Trust website, www.NativePlantTrust.org, which will be regularly updated.

The Yard Futures Project is a collaboration of scientists affiliated with institutions from across the U.S., including Woodwell Climate Research Center, Duke University, City University of New York, University of Massachusetts, Johns Hopkins University, University of Minnesota, Arizona State University, U.S. Forest Service, University of Utah, University of Delaware, Portland State University, Davidson College, Clark University, Masaryk University, University of Vermont and Virginia Tech. The research focuses on homeowners and their yards in the metropolitan areas of Boston, Baltimore, Los Angeles, Miami, Minneapolis-St. Paul, and Phoenix and includes on-site field studies, extensive surveys, and interviews.

The project studies the impact of homeowners' choices and examines not only how homeowners shape their yards, but also importantly why they make particular choices about lawns, gardens, and maintenance regimes. The project measures how yards influence attributes of residential ecosystems such as plant and insect biodiversity, microclimates, soil carbon and the potential for nitrogen runoff.

The team is publishing most of the project findings in peer-reviewed scientific journals and other professional outlets; the brief articles at www.NativePlantTrust.org present the results in an accessible, engaging way that can immediately be put to use by the public. Christopher Neill, Ph.D., Senior Scientist at the Woodwell Climate Research Center, is editorial director and lead author for the series.

“We are very excited to partner with Woodwell Climate Research Center and the entire scientific team from institutions across the country,” notes Debbi Edelstein, Executive Director, Native Plant Trust. “The Yard Futures Project examines one of most important landscapes in the country, our yards, and has the potential to bring significant ecological change to millions of acres, especially those with a traditional lawn, which is the largest irrigated crop in the country and consumes enormous amounts of time and resources. We are proud to be a partner and to share the latest research on our website.”

“Urban and suburban yards now cover huge areas across the US. And more and more people care deeply about making their yards better habitat for wildlife and better providers of some of the services more natural areas provide, like carbon storage and shade that lowers air temperatures,” said Chris Neill. “This project aims to take what we’ve learned from studying yards across the country and put it in a form that homeowners can both understand and translate into things that they can do in their own yards.”

The project receives funding from the National Science Foundation’s Macro Systems Biology Program, which is investigating the causes and consequences of large-scale ecological patterns.

ABOUT NATIVE PLANT TRUST

Native Plant Trust is the nation’s first plant conservation organization and the only one solely focused on New England’s native plants. We save native plants in the wild, grow them for gardens and restorations, and educate others on their value and use. We are based at Garden in the Woods, a renowned native plant botanic garden that attracts visitors from all over the world. From this flagship property in Framingham, Massachusetts, twenty-five staff and many of our 1,500 trained volunteers work throughout New England each year to monitor and protect rare and endangered plants, collect and preserve seeds to ensure biological diversity, detect and control invasive species, conduct research, and offer a range of educational programs. Native Plant Trust also operates a nursery at Nasami Farm in western Massachusetts and manages six sanctuaries in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont that are open to the public. Native Plant Trust is among the first organizations worldwide to receive Advanced Conservation Practitioner accreditation by London-based Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI), which included an endorsement by an International Advisory Council representing six continents. Please visit www.NativePlantTrust.org.

ABOUT WOODWELL CLIMATE RESEARCH CENTER

Woodwell Climate Research Center (formerly Woods Hole Research Center) studies climate change impacts around the world, and works with partners - from national governments to corporations- to identify and implement opportunities to reduce levels of atmospheric greenhouse gas. WCRC was founded in 1985 by renowned ecologist George Woodwell to take the insights of science beyond the walls of academia to where they can reflect real change. For the last four years, Woodwell Climate Research Center was named the top climate change think tank in the world by the International Center for Climate Governance. WCRC scientists have contributed to every IPCC Assessment Report and helped launch the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. In 2007, WCRC senior scientist Dr. Richard Houghton was part of the IPCC team awarded the Nobel Prize. For more information please visit www.woodwellclimate.org.

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