



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – August 28, 2007**

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### **NATIONAL “CENTENNIAL CHALLENGE” SELECTS EXTRAORDINARY POTOMAC WATERSHED ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAM BASED IN THE NATION’S CAPITAL REGION**

In Yosemite National Park last week to celebrate the 91<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the National Park Service, Director Mary Bomar and Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne announced that the Alice Ferguson Foundation’s Bridging the Watershed (BTW) environmental education program will be expanded throughout the Potomac Watershed as part of the National Park Service “Centennial Challenge.”

Bridging the Watershed (BTW) is a unique partnership program of the Alice Ferguson Foundation and the National Park Service for high school students and teachers that provide understanding and stewardship of natural resources and public lands focused on the ecology of the Potomac Watershed. Using the national parks as living laboratories leads high school students and teachers to become future stewards of national parks and the environment.

“The Centennial Challenge is a critical element in the National Park Centennial Initiative put forward by President Bush and unveiled by Secretary Kempthorne one year ago,” Bomar said about the Centennial Challenge – a funding mechanism to match up to \$100 million a year over 10 years of public money with \$100 million a year for 10 years in private donations. Financial commitments to the first round of proposals exceeded President Bush’s challenge. “We have about \$370 million in proposals with not \$100 million in private commitments but \$216 million committed from park visitors, friends groups and other partners,” Bomar said.

“The Alice Ferguson Foundation has been a dedicated partner in coordinating conservation efforts in the National Capital Region and teaching citizens how to be good stewards of the environment,” Congressman Steny Hoyer said today. “It is a great testament to the value of the Bridging the Watershed program that it was selected as a candidate to receive federal funding as part of the National Park Centennial Initiative.”

U.S. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin (MD), recognizing the importance of Bridging the Watershed programs for the high school students who learn hands-on science in ten national parks within the National Capital Region, said “the Alice Ferguson Foundation is dedicated to connecting people with the Potomac Watershed and to enhancing their understanding and appreciation of the environment. The Alice Ferguson Foundation has been a long-time leader in environmental programming, and I commend the National Park Service for selecting its Bridging the Watershed program as a candidate to receive federal funds as part of the Centennial Challenge.

The “Centennial Challenge will help expand the reach the Bridging the Watershed program to more students and educators, ranging from rural areas in Maryland and Virginia, Pennsylvania and West Virginia to inner-city schools in the District of Columbia. The program represents a dynamic private/public partnership of diverse populations of high school students and teachers in the Potomac Watershed with the rich resources of their national parks.

“This very dynamic public-private partnership with the National Park Service allows us to bring thousands of students and teachers throughout the Potomac Watershed to these amazing parks and conduct innovative hands-on education programs,” says Tracy Bowen, Executive Director of the Alice Ferguson Foundation. National Park Service Superintendent Gayle Hazelwood of National Capital Parks – East added that the National Park Service is “excited to get this Centennial project underway” when the new fiscal year begins in October.

The Alice Ferguson Foundation is a unique educational nonprofit organization founded in 1954 that operates the Hard Bargain Farm Environmental Center – a beautiful 330-acre working farm and native woodland located on the shorelines of the Potomac River south of Washington, D.C.

Every year, AFF shares the wonder and excitement of the Potomac River, a working farm, woods and wetlands each year with more than 10,000 students from throughout the Potomac Watershed. AFF also coordinates the annual Potomac Watershed Cleanup and is spearheading the Trash Free Potomac by 2013 Initiative.

Bridging the Watershed was developed by Alice Ferguson Foundation and the National Park Service in 1998 through a grant from the National Park Foundation as a model education program in the District of Columbia metropolitan area for high school students, an underserved population in national parks. More than one half of AFF’s students come from low-income schools with a high proportion of at-risk youth. Their participation often marks their first nature experience and profoundly educates them about the impact they have on the environment and our natural resources.

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