The Nature Conservancy
SAVING THE LAST GREAT PLACES ON EARTH

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Chicago Great Lakes Scientist to speak at World Parks Congress in South Africa

2,500 conservationists to participate in 5th World Parks Conference on Protected Areas

CHICAGO, IL — Michele DePhilip, an aquatic ecologist with The Nature Conservancy's Great Lakes Program, will be a speaker at the 5th World Parks Conference on Protected Areas to be held in Durban, South Africa, September 8 –17. DePhilip will be speaking on the need to address issues outside the defined boundaries of the protected areas, these include the larger issues of natural water levels and flows that feed and protect the range of species within the freshwater ecosystems. DePhilip is one of four attendees from the Chicago area, each representing different organizations. Out of the four, she is the only guest speaker.

Protected areas may include wilderness areas, national parks and other types of reserves.

"Patterns of water levels and flows, often controlled outside the water body and outside the protected area, are critical to protecting native species," DePhilip said. "I'm focusing on three efforts to restore water levels and flows for native species in protected areas in the Great Lakes, Lake Ontario and in Kentucky. In these three areas in North America, protection of the natural ebb and flow of the water systems is being incorporated into the water management processes."

Natural areas directly influence the quality of life and economic viability of local and world communities. They are host to a wide suite of life-sustaining materials: providing and regenerating water, filtering the air and preventing soil runoff. Natural areas hold the promise of foods and medicines, provide nutrients used in food and fiber, and mitigate major storms and other natural phenomenon.

"In the Great Lakes, regional water policy is being developed that recognizes the protection of hydrology as critical to ensuring ecosystems are not harmed. Science has shown that ecosystems are actually improved by water management projects," DePhilip said. "Managing for a natural ebb and flow regime helps improve the fish, mussel and plant populations."

The topic of this year's congress is 'Benefits Beyond Boundaries,' looking at new approaches outside traditional thinking used for establishing and managing natural, protected areas.

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DePhilip has been an ecologist with the Conservancy's Great Lakes Program since 1998. In her role she has led an effort to identify areas that are significant for a range of native freshwater species in the Great Lakes basin, and has incorporated the results into a conservation blueprint that includes places important for rare species, natural communities, and declining and vulnerable birds within the freshwater ecosystem. She tracks research and emerging issues to help evaluate and develop strategies to abate threats to the quality of water-based systems including altered water systems, invasive species and incompatible forest management.

DePhilip earned a Master of Science degree from the University of Michigan, School of Natural Resources and Environment, and a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana.

The congress of experts meets once every ten years, convened by the World Conservation Union (IUCN), and is considered a premier international gathering. This Congress will focus on landscape-scale and ecosystem approaches to conservation, developing tools that will help local managers cope with an ever changing world.

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