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PRESS RELEASE

WWF-Cambodia Launches Decision Support Tool to Incorporate Nature into Policy Making and Improve Land Use Planning

Phnom Penh, Cambodia – 25 January 2016 –WWF-Cambodia, together with the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) and the Provincial Government of Monduliri, is holding a workshop to launch a new support tool that has been developed to incorporate nature and ecosystem services into policy making and improve sustainable land use planning in Cambodia. The tool is called InVEST (Integrated Valuation of Ecosystem Services and Trade-offs) and has been funded by USAID's Cambodia Supporting Forests and Biodiversity project (USAID SFB), and implemented by Winrock International, with partner WWF-Cambodia and other NGOs; and by the European Union (EU) funded: "Sustaining Biodiversity, Environmental and Social benefits in the Protected Areas of the Eastern Plains landscape of Cambodia" Project.

"Understanding where the most biodiverse and naturally rich areas are in Cambodia and the economic value these resources have towards local communities and the country as a whole, is imperative if we are to conserve these landscapes and the biodiversity they hold," said Curtis Hundley, Chief of Party, SFB-Project, Winrock International.

Ecosystem services are the goods and services that nature provides us for free that are beneficial to our health and wellbeing, such as clean water, climate regulation, recreation and tourism. The problem is that these services are being hugely undervalued and this is leading to a loss of natural resources. By incorporating these ecosystem services into policy making and land use planning, areas that are rich in biodiversity / ecosystem services can be better protected, and economic development projects can be provided in areas of degraded land. This will ultimately provide greater protection to the resources that give us life.

Through the support and funding of USAID and the EU, the InVEST tool has been developed to geographically map ecosystem services and economically value these services in order to improve decision-making; in turn reducing the environmental degradation taking place. Under the USAID-SFB project and the European Union (EU) Project, WWF-Cambodia is supporting efforts to improve the distribution of ecosystem services equitable economic benefits from ecosystem-based management of forests in the Eastern Plains Landscape. This is being done through improving land use management and income generation opportunities from sustainable use and management of forest resources. WWF believe that mapping and valuing ecosystem services is the most important and fundamental step to incorporating these services into policies and consequently move towards a Green Economy in Cambodia. The InVEST tool has already been implemented successfully in countries such as Indonesia, Belize and China, and is now being introduced to Cambodia to help assist with sustainable policy making and land use planning.

"The EU acknowledges the importance of the InVEST tool and encourages its implementation to conduct an integrated valuation of the vital ecosystem services that are present in Cambodia. Using this tool, biodiversity and the natural resources that support local communities can be included in key decision making policies and protected within the region," H.E. George Edgar, Ambassador of the European Union to Cambodia.

In order to bring this tool to Cambodia, The Natural Capital Project (consisting of Stanford University's Woods Institute for the Environment, University of Minnesota's Institute on the Environment and The Nature Conservancy) worked collaboratively with RUPP and Monduliri

Provincial Government to learn how to develop and use it in the region. WWF then engaged with key stakeholders: provincial level government officials to develop scenarios. Scenario development is a key part of the tool and it involves developing alternative futures under different trajectories: a business as usual path, a conservation path and a green economy (or sustainable development) path.

The main aim of tomorrow's workshop is to showcase how useful the InVEST tool can be and the potential significance it has when applied to political and economic decision-making processes in Cambodia. It has real potential to support the path to Sustainable Development in Cambodia, and the lessons learnt from mapping and analysis in the Eastern Plains Landscape can be scaled up to the whole country if the valuable, but finite natural resources are to be protected.

"The InVEST tool is a key step forward in protecting our natural heritage and moving towards a sustainable, green future in Cambodia", Chhith Sam Ath, Country Director of WWF-Cambodia.

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News to Editor:

About USAID SFB

The USAID SFB Project – implemented by Winrock International – funds WWF conservation activities that improve the conservation and governance of the Eastern Plains and Prey Lang landscapes to mitigate climate change and conserve biodiversity. The Project works alongside the Royal Government of Cambodia officers at all levels, forest communities, NGOs and other stakeholders to: 1) enhance the effectiveness of government and key natural resource managers at national and subnational levels to sustainably manage forests and conserve biodiversity; 2) improve constructive dialogue on forest management and economic development at the national and sub-national levels; and 3) increase equitable economic benefits from the sustainable management of forests.

About USAID

USAID works with Cambodian and international partners on a broad range of programs designed to benefit all Cambodians. Areas of focus include strengthening democratic governance and human rights, improving health and child development, fostering economic growth, alleviating poverty, increasing agricultural production and food security, helping households adapt to and mitigate the effects of global climate change, and fighting trafficking in persons.

About WWF-Cambodia

WWF was established in Cambodia in 1995 as a part of the WWF Greater Mekong Programme. WWF's mission in Cambodia is to ensure that there will be strong participation and support from all people to conserve the country's rich biological diversity. Through the encouragement of sustainable use of natural resources, WWF-Cambodia promotes new opportunities for the benefit of all people, enhancing local livelihoods and contributing to poverty reduction in the Kingdom of Cambodia. Go to cambodia.panda.org for more information.

About The Natural Capital Project

The Natural Capital Project developed the InVEST tool. It is a joint venture between Stanford University's Woods Institute for the Environment, University of Minnesota's Institute on the Environment, The Nature Conservancy, and WWF. Please feel free to visit the website for more information: www.naturalcapitalproject.org

About the European Union-Cambodia

Over the years, EU-Cambodia cooperation activities have touched the lives of millions of Cambodians. EU development cooperation programmes involve Cambodians from all walks of life and take place in sectors ranging from education and agriculture to governance, public finance management, private sector development and climate change. The EU together with the Member States is Cambodia's largest partner in terms of development assistance.

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