



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Dec. 3, 2010

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Sophie and Derek Craighead, Vance Carruth, Dave Muskat honored at Conservation Alliance annual meeting

Each year since 2003, the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance has recognized an Outstanding Conservationist of the Year. The award honors those who have shown a lifetime of commitment to conservation, and on Dec. 2, the Alliance was pleased to grant this honor to Sophie and Derek Craighead for all of their work on behalf of the valley's wildlife, natural resources and community.

“Sophie and Derek have long been committed to the Jackson Hole area and beyond,” said Alliance Co-Vice Chair Nancy Taylor in presenting the award at the group's annual meeting. “Together they are wonderful assets to the whole community and to the Alliance.”

Sophie received her bachelor's degree from the Georgetown School of Foreign Service and master's from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. A well-known philanthropist, she supports many diverse causes – from land mine eradication in Sri Lanka, to housing homeless pets, to preserving the environment. Here in the valley, Sophie quietly and humbly supports numerous critical local and regional conservation projects, and she played a key role in retiring grazing allotments, thereby protecting public lands. Sophie has also served on many boards, including (but not limited to) PAWS of Jackson Hole, the Jackson Hole Community School, Teton County PAL, the Delta Society, the Curran-Seeley Foundation, Craighead Beringia South, the Jackson Hole Community Foundation and the Charles W. Engelhard Foundation.

“She brings her boundless passion for all animals to every issue that she works on, and has proven time and again to be an incredibly effective advocate,” Taylor said. “And above all, she is courageous, wise and generous in her support of many different projects. In the words of Lisa Robertson, a previous Outstanding Conservationist recipient, ‘Thank God Sophie made the valley her home; we all win, every single year.’ ”

Derek, an ecologist and the founder, president and executive director of Craighead Beringia South, has devoted many years to ground-breaking environmental research. He received his B.A. and M.S. degrees in wildlife biology from the University of Montana, and has worked in Alaska and Montana as well as Wyoming. As the leader of Craighead Beringia South, Derek has focused his work on both research and advocacy – connecting studies and data to real-life

recommendations for managing the unparalleled wildlife of our valley. His work on the downstream impacts of lead bullets on ravens, eagles and the larger ecosystem has led to grant funding for copper bullet giveaways and raised public awareness of the issue.

“From his research on the Upper Snake River Basin sage grouse population to his study of the Gobi bears in Mongolia, Derek continues to use his extensive ecological knowledge and experience to improve our understanding of the world around us,” Taylor said. “The son of famed researcher John Craighead, Derek has followed in the footsteps of his father and his uncle, Frank Craighead, as well as expanding on their legacy.”

The Alliance also presented Vance Carruth and Dave Muskat with Hats Off awards in recognition of their dedication toward keeping Jackson Hole wild and beautiful.

Since retiring from careers in teaching and as a tour director around the world, Vance Carruth has been exceptionally active in numerous environmental issues in our community. An avid wildlife photographer, Vance last year gathered a group of people interested in protecting that wildlife from the impacts of roads and traffic. “He’s been a driving force in efforts to get wildlife mitigations for highway reconstruction projects in Teton County,” said Louise Lasley, Alliance public lands director. Carruth later said that “those who answered my call and have each contributed so much to the efforts to make responsible and effective wildlife crossings possible in the expansion projects in Jackson Hole are the real heroes, and they are the ones who truly deserve this award.”

Dave Muskat joined the Alliance as volunteer chair of its Strategic Planning Committee in 2010, showing an extraordinary commitment toward leading this process. He recently retired as a partner at Accenture, where he spent more than 20 years as a management consultant specializing in strategy work. “With an astounding ability to maintain focus on the mission of the Alliance, while debating the details that make the difference, Dave is working with staff, board and other community members to help us craft and hone our future direction,” said Cindy Harger, Alliance interim executive director. “Between nights on the phone and facilitating several meetings a day, Dave has impressed us with his passion and dedication to the Alliance and to the valley’s unique wildlife and natural resources.”

The Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance is a nonprofit organization dedicated to responsible land stewardship to ensure that human activities are in harmony with the area's irreplaceable wildlife, scenic and other natural resources. The organization has 2,000-some members from Jackson Hole and around the globe.