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**ARIZONA CENTER FOR NATURE CONSERVATION RECEIVES \$100,000
IMPLEMENTATION GRANT FROM THE FLINN FOUNDATION**

Grant will support project for South Mountain Environmental Education Center

PHOENIX (February 13) – The Arizona Center for Nature Conservation (ACNC) today announced the receipt of a \$100,000 implementation grant award from the Flinn Foundation in support of a project to increase awareness of the South Mountain Environmental Education Center (SMEEEC) and promote its offerings.

In February of 2016, ACNC entered into a five year agreement with the City of Phoenix to operate SMEEEC, located in South Mountain Park, one of the largest municipal preserves in the country.

“Operating SMEEEC reinforces our commitment to conservation education in our community and is aligned well with our institutional mission,” says Bert Castro, President and CEO of the Arizona Center for Nature Conservation. “Over the year, our programming at SMEEEC reached guests from around the world, including students from neighboring schools, providing much-needed science learning opportunities in a fun and engaging setting. While we are encouraged by the reception we’ve received by the community, we envision a broadened scope that will reach expanded audiences and highlight our role as a conservation organization. We are grateful to the Flinn Foundation for their support. This grant will allow us to increase our marketing capabilities, invest in needed improvements and create programming that is suited for the audiences we wish to serve, while maintaining financial stability within the organization.”

“The Flinn Foundation has an abiding interest in a thriving arts-and-culture sector in our state, and the Arizona Center for Nature Conservation’s strategic initiatives to develop its role in the community are exciting,” said Jack B. Jewett, President and CEO of the Flinn Foundation. “This project at SMEEEC holds promise to reach new and diverse patrons while further strengthening ACNC’s financial position.”

A strong marketing campaign is underway that aims to boost recognition of the Center through promotional materials including online, print and outdoor advertising, as well as enhanced signage within the park area. Local outreach efforts and open houses are also planned to connect with businesses, including realtors, event planners and concierges, to showcase the Center as a convenient and valuable venue space in which to hold meetings and events. Technology needs have been identified and will be addressed soon along with enhanced furnishings to increase the Center's desirability as an event space.

A free public event will be held at SMEEC on Saturday, February 18 from 9 a.m. – 1 p.m. to celebrate the one-year anniversary of the Center opening. Animal ambassadors, guided hikes, activities and more will be available for the public to enjoy as they explore the Center and the beautiful park. More information about the event can be found at smeec.org.

About the Arizona Center for Nature Conservation

The Arizona Center for Nature Conservation operates the Phoenix Zoo and the South Mountain Environmental Education Center. The ACNC advances the stewardship and conservation of animals and their habitats while providing experiences that inspire people and motivate them to care for the natural world.

The Phoenix Zoo is the only zoo in the Valley accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and is a non-profit zoological park, serving 1.4 million guests annually. The Zoo is home to more than 1,400 animals, many of which are endangered and threatened species. For information on upcoming events, exhibits and activities at the Phoenix Zoo, visit www.phoenixzoo.org.

The South Mountain Environmental Education Center re-opened through an Operating Agreement between the Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department and the ACNC. The facility is a hub for guests exploring the park/preserve as well as a gathering place for the community to learn about plants, animals, natural history and the conservation needs of the Sonoran Desert. It also is a popular destination for school field trips and family outings. Learn more at www.smeec.org.