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Connect the Spots: Arizona Center for Nature Conservation/Phoenix Zoo, ProCAT and ASU's Acoustic Ecology Lab Awarded Grant to Support Costa Rica Jaguar Corridor

PHOENIX (September 28, 2021) – Scientists at the Arizona Center for Nature Conservation (ACNC)/Phoenix Zoo, ProCAT (Proyecto de Conservación de Aguas y Tierras) and ASU's Acoustic Ecology Lab were recently awarded over $195,000 through the US Fish and Wildlife Service Latin America Program for a two-year conservation and research project. The purpose of this project is to reconnect jaguar habitats in Costa Rica by using technology to reduce illegal hunting while working with local communities to improve livelihoods. This funding program is highly competitive, with only three to four grants given each year for projects in Central America.

This project aims to conserve jaguars and their prey by addressing the impacts of illegal hunting, retaliatory killing and habitat conversion, and by promoting jaguar friendly practices. Currently, illegal hunting threatens the functionality of the wildlife corridor linking La Amistad International Park with the lowlands of the Osa Peninsula, including Corcovado National Park.

"This is a huge step forward in bringing together experts from different fields to solve global problems. Thousands of species are threatened by illegal hunting, so if we can figure out how to detect and report a jaguar poacher in Costa Rica in real time, we have a chance at stopping poachers almost anywhere," said Dr. Jan Schipper, ACNC/Phoenix Zoo Field Conservation Director and project lead.

"Working with the Phoenix Zoo, my lab at ASU has developed a cheap and energy efficient way to detect gunshot several miles from the source and alert rangers to the location," says Dr. Garth Paine, Professor in ASU's School of Arts, Media and Engineering. "This is a breakthrough in cost and robustness for remote environments where species protection is critical. We hope that future work will build on this infrastructure to produce real time species density metrics

and other critical environmental monitoring. The data is available locally and in real time across the internet so Zoo researchers can analyze the data remotely."

The awarded funding will go toward the following activities:

- Implementing acoustic anti-poaching arrays (gunshot detectors) to pinpoint illegal hunting in real time to assist park security.
- Collaborating with local landowners and farmers to develop wildlife friendly livelihoods (including Jaguar Friendly™ Coffee).
- Working directly within communities to support habitat restoration and conservation education.

"This project represents a unique opportunity for reconnecting two of the most unique biological areas in the world," explains Dr. José F. González-Maya, Director for ProCAT. "By bringing together science, monitoring and sustainable production, we not only aim for restoring necessary ecological processes but also enlisting local communities as stewards of conservation in this singular landscape of southern Costa Rica."

The Talamanca Mountains, including La Amistad International Park, are one of the largest remaining blocks of jaguar habitat in Central America. Currently, a lack of suitable habitat and sufficient prey between the Talamanca Mountains and the Osa Peninsula makes safe passage between the two jaguar populations nearly impossible. This project aims to rebuild connectivity between these two important habitats, protecting jaguars and a wide array of other wildlife.

ACNC/Phoenix Zoo, ProCAT, and ASU have a tremendous amount of experience working with communities and wildlife conservation to find win-win solutions to conservation challenges. This project capitalizes on the expertise of each co-investigator and their networks. This will bring together farmers/ranchers, government agencies and other conservation organizations to promote sustainable livelihoods, education, and species conservation.

About the Arizona Center for Nature Conservation

The Arizona Center for Nature Conservation operates the Phoenix Zoo. 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 3,000 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.

About ProCAT

ProCAT, Proyecto de Conservación de Aguas y Tierras, is a non-governmental organization that works to develop biological research and to promote social and cultural sustainable development goals using and interdisciplinary approach including the human and natural

dimensions of conservation. This integrated conservation strategy to protect key species and vulnerable ecosystems aims to ensure the wellbeing of biodiversity and humans in functional landscapes with shared benefits. With projects in Costa Rica, Colombia and Mexico, ProCAT focuses on bringing the best available science to the resolution of complex conservation problems in the tropics. For more information, please reach out to info@procat-conservation.org.

About ASU School of Arts, Media and Engineering

The School of Arts, Media and Engineering (AME) educates the next generation of learners and empowers them with technofluency -- its development, application, and implications. The School of Arts, Media and Engineering prepares students to be socially aware, critically thinking global citizens who strive to bring about positive change in a society that will be increasingly shaped by revolutions in new technologies.

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