

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BLUE SPRINGS NATURE PRESERVE UNVEILS MASTER PLAN

Plans call for wildflower gardens, trails, campgrounds

RAGLAND, ALA. — November 13, 2007 — Plans for the Blue Springs Nature Preserve were revealed at the Ragland Community Center today to community leaders and area residents.

Blue Springs Nature Preserve retained Huntsville-based landplanning firm 4Site, Inc. to create the plan, which included a charrette conducted in fall 2006 with the Blue Springs Nature Preserve Steering Committee to develop ideas for the plan.

Blue Springs Nature Preserve consists of a 147-acre parcel of former farming land in Ragland. Provided by National Cement Company of Alabama, Inc., a major producer of cement in the United States, the property will serve in perpetuity as a public nature preserve. The site is located at the conjunction of Trout Creek and Blues Springs Fork and includes pastures, wetlands and heavily wooded areas.

“Our goal from the outset was to establish an outdoor classroom for students of St. Clair County, while providing a recreation venue for the public to experience nature in its purest form,” said Spencer Weitman, president of National Cement and chairman of the Blue Springs Nature Preserve Steering Committee. “With the completion of this master plan, we believe we have an opportunity to create something that people throughout the region will enjoy for many years to come.”

In 2003, National Cement set aside the land and donated approximately \$250,000 in “seed funding” for development of the preserve as a 501(C)(3) non-profit organization.

The plan for Blue Springs Nature Preserve prescribes the following:

Highway 144 Entrance — This site will be a dedicated access point to Blue Springs, with a parking lot and transportation by tram into the preserve.

Alabama Wildflower Gardens — Located near an old farm pond, an outdoor arboretum showcases native plants, such as the endangered Alabama Leatherflower. A visitor center will include a weather-protected exhibit space, a greenhouse, public restrooms, and an outdoor gathering space for self-guided tours.

Cultural Preservation Building — Visitors can relive the history of St. Clair County through artifacts and exhibits, such as a cotton gin from the Civil War era.

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Spencer's Bluff – An elevated knoll overlooking the lake near the tram route, this feature provides an optimum location for picnics and resting, with a covered pavilion, restrooms and drinking fountains.

Visitor's Facilities – Atop the knoll along the ridge line rest the principal buildings, such as the education center, administrative offices and classrooms.

Prairie, Wildflower and Ridge areas – Visitors can explore Blue Springs through a network of trails, which provide access to scenic overlooks and streamside greenways, as well as wetlands and prairies, restored to their original state.

Trout Creek Crossing – A boardwalk provides an up-close view of the rivers and wetlands, an ideal venue for first-hand outdoor education.

Primitive Campgrounds – In the preserve's wooded areas, visitors have the opportunity to camp in a rustic setting.

Future phases include a dormitory, kitchen facilities and a conference center.

The Blue Springs Nature Preserve Steering Committee will commence a fundraising campaign in 2008.

About Blue Springs Nature Preserve:

Blue Spring Nature Preserve, a nonprofit organization, is the result of a public-private collaboration between National Cement Company, citizens and elected officials of Ragland and St. Clair County, Ala.

About National Cement:

National Cement is a major producer of cement in the Southeastern United States. It employs more than 1,255 in Birmingham, Ala., and California. The company is highly committed to environmental stewardship and supporting community activities and projects. Since 1974, the company has been owned by the Paris, France-based Vicat Group, which manufactures cement and produces ready-mixed concrete and aggregates at facilities employing more than 5,700 people in France, the United States, Turkey, Senegal, Switzerland, Egypt and Italy. For more information, visit www.vicat.com.

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