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**SATW PRESENTS 2015 PHOENIX AWARDS TO
CONSERVATION & PRESERVATION TOURISM LEADERS**

DOWNTOWN LAS VEGAS, NV (Oct. 5, 2015) – The Society of American Travel Writers (SATW) presented four tourism projects with its coveted Phoenix Awards on Oct. 5 at the SATW Annual Convention in Downtown Las Vegas. The Phoenix Awards were created by SATW in 1969 to recognize exceptional conservation and preservation efforts of individuals and organizations as they relate to travel.

The four outstanding tourism projects receiving 2015 Phoenix Awards are as follows:

- Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary, Nebraska
- Union Station Alliance, Colorado
- Dearbhail Standún & Charlie Troy, Ireland
- Ice Age Trail Alliance, Wisconsin

SATW Phoenix Committee Chair, Toby Saltzman said, “This year’s international array of nominees represent a diverse scope of ventures in conservation and preservation. The 2015 Phoenix Award winners deserve accolades for conceptualizing and creating inspiring projects that required passionate dedication and painstaking efforts to ultimately generate positive impact in the realms of nature, culture or historic preservation.”

Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary

The Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary is a wildlife sanctuary dedicated to the conservation and preservation of the Platte River Ecosystem for cranes, other wildlife, and people. The sanctuary has been working for 41 years to protect the river and promote awareness of the importance of the Platte River to wildlife. It is located in the middle of the largest gathering of cranes in the world. Each spring more than 500,000 Sandhill Cranes and millions of waterfowl migrate to the area and stop for three to four weeks on the remaining wide shallow channels of the Platte River to gather fat reserves on their way to nesting grounds in Canada, Alaska and Siberia. Over the past 41 years, the sanctuary has become the prime destination for people from around the world to see one of nature's most amazing wildlife spectacles.

The Iain Nicolson Audubon Center's efforts to educate people about one of America's last great migrations has created a tourism industry that brings an estimated \$10-25 million into the local economy each year. The number of people that come to see the cranes has grown from a few locals each year to tens of thousands of people from all around the world. During the spring of 2015 Rowe Sanctuary recorded guests from all 50 states and 66 different countries.

One judge commented of the project: "After four decades of concerted efforts to create a migratory haven for the planet's largest gathering of Sandhill Cranes as well as millions of waterfowl who come to nest and feed along the Platte River, the Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary has ultimately established a hallmark for how a small group of environmentally astute people can persevere to create ecological and water-sustainable projects that, in turn, generate eco-tourism dollars for the local community, and provide a natural paradise for educational programs."

Union Station Alliance

On July 12, 2014, Denver celebrated the opening of the \$500 million restoration of the city's Union Station. The historic 1914 train terminal, which was virtually abandoned and had fallen into disrepair, is now home to eight restaurants, a branch of the famous Tattered Cover Bookstore, a cocktail lounge and beer garden, and the independent 112-room Crawford Hotel. The station also fulfills its original role as the "Grand Central Station" of Denver – the city's major ground transportation hub.

The Union Station Alliance was created as a team of retailers, hoteliers and restaurant developers working with the Regional Transportation District and Amtrak to restore the station. The restored station incorporates dozens of details from the “Golden Age” of railroading.

Commented one judge: “Denver’s reconstructed Union Station is an excellent example of urban renewal. The stunning, multi-use structure (with hotel, restaurants and coming train station) speaks volumes of how a group of dedicated, insightful people can turn a historic, albeit derelict station into a vibrant hub that draws people and becomes a vibrant tourism destination itself.”

Dearbhaill Standún & Charlie Troy

Dearbhaill Standun and Charlie Troy created Cnoc Suain, an international award-winning cultural retreat set in a restored 17th century hill-village located in the Conamara Gaeltacht area of Galway county. Cnoc Suain is dedicated to fostering and presenting the authentic culture, nature and heritage of Conamara.

Established in 1995 and completed in 2008, the retreat is rooted in heritage and operates with principles of responsible tourism, sustainability and innovation to present a true insight into a living minority culture and way of life. Cnoc Suain involves the local Gaeltacht community and works in harmony with various regional cultural, culinary and ecotourism groups.

Through day visits and residential programs, Cnoc Suain's founders use an interactive, hands-on approach for activities that range from exploring the Atlantic Blanket Bogland ecosystem to making Irish soda bread and learning traditional Irish dances. Dearbhaill, a professional musician and native Gaelic speaker, hosts the cultural programs on cooking, the Gaelic language, music and dancing, while Charlie, a natural scientist, leads tours of the bogland and explains the uses of peat and sphagnum moss in the Field Study Room. A restored cottage, an authentic kitchen and a dedicated music and cultural center are the venues for Dearbhaill’s programs, and she often brings in local musicians for music and dancing lessons. Residential guests, who stay in restored cottages, have access to Cnoc Suain’s research library.

Ice Age Trail Alliance

The Ice Age Trail Alliance (IATA) is a nonprofit organization and accredited land trust. The Ice Age Trail (IAT), a 1,200-mile footpath, showcases Wisconsin's glacial remains by

tracing the edge of the last continental glaciations and is one of just 11 National Scenic Trails, and can be enjoyed via hiking, backpacking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and birding. After more than 50 years of work, the trail is just over half completed; more than 600 miles of trail are built and blazed, stitched together by some 500 road miles, or connecting routes.

Building a long-distance trail generally takes decades, as the process involves innumerable land transactions to purchase land outright or secure trail or conservation easements in perpetuity. Yet while the IAT isn't yet complete, in the last decade, the IATA has made significant strides in accelerating the pace of trail-building, and in creating more ways in which the public can enjoy the trail. In its first 45 years, for example, IATA volunteers built about 10 new miles of trail annually. Today, they've increased the pace 50 percent, averaging about 15 miles per year.

In 2014, the Alliance published a vastly improved trail guidebook, which incorporates helpful information such as which segments close temporarily during the state's various hunting seasons, and which segments have restrictions on hiking with dogs. Eleven of the trail's 21 volunteer chapters now offer hiking award programs to draw more interest in the trail and its continued development, and in 2008, a Cold Cache program was created. Similar to geocaching, it involves finding natural geologic features along the trail rather than human-placed caches. The IATA also now partners with the Wisconsin Bed & Breakfast Association to help hikers find lodging along the trail. According to the Alliance, those hiking the trail today "will have a dramatically more enjoyable experience" than those who hiked it just five or 10 years ago.

Phoenix Award Nomination Process

SATW members were invited to nominate individuals, communities, businesses or organizations that have contributed to a quality travel experience through conservation, preservation, beautification or environmental efforts. Nominations describing the evolution and positive impacts of worthy projects were considered by the SATW Phoenix Awards Committee, led by program chair Toby Saltzman and were submitted with recommendations to the SATW Board of Directors for approval. Other Phoenix committee members, including Bea Broda, Cheryl Hargrove, Cathy Senecal, Kathryn Straach, Marilyn Marx, Katy Koontz and Marian Goldberg.

Society of American Travel Writers (SATW)

The Society's 1,100-plus members include: journalists; photographers; editors; bloggers and online content providers; film lecturers, radio, television and film producers; and tourism-industry public relations representatives.

Headquartered in Oakbrook Terrace, IL, SATW is a nonprofit 501(c)(6) professional association. SATW members strive to maintain the industry's highest professional and ethical standards. Their dedication and experience represent the Society's commitment to journalistic integrity and credibility.

SATW truly comprises "*Travel's Most Trusted Voices.*"

For more information, contact the Society of American Travel Writers at 1 Parkview Plaza, Suite 800, Oakbrook Terrace, IL 60181; phone: (847) 686-2250; or email: info@satw.org. Visit www.SATW.org.

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