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### For Immediate Release

## Navajo County Receives Science Foundation Arizona Planning Grant to Further Science and Math Learning in Local Schools

*Wetlands become “Outdoor Classrooms” that develop Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) skills*

**SHOW LOW, AZ September 11, 2009** – Students throughout Navajo County will soon be able to engage in hands-on science instruction outside their regular classroom to study various life cycles and biological environments thanks to a \$50,000 planning grant from Science Foundation Arizona and the Arizona State Board of Education. Navajo County Education Service will receive the Mathematics or Science Achievement Grant (MSAG) award to develop an interactive, outdoor science program that incorporates the study of local wildlife that thrive in the wetlands of Pintail Lake and Jacques Marsh.

Science Foundation's goal in awarding the competitive grant is to support highly innovative, inquiry-based instruction that brings science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) learning to life for students and stimulates interest in science and technology careers. The rich wetland ecosystem in Navajo County has evolved over the last 30 years to become a diverse habitat for insects, fowl, plants and wildlife that serve critical hydrological and ecological functions. This setting provides a unique rural Arizona environment that enriches a biology curriculum.

The Navajo County Education Service will use the MSAG funds to create an outdoor, wetlands-based science curriculum that teachers can utilize at four specific locations to benefit K-12 students in Show Low, Pinetop-Lakeside, and the Hopi Reservation. The off-site program will provide a seasonal, dynamic curriculum and introduce new ways for young people to grasp scientific concepts incorporating living study subjects in their natural habitats.

“This interactive, wetlands-based curriculum is an excellent way for young people to become excited about science and its many applications,” said William C. Harris, president and CEO of Science Foundation Arizona. “I am especially pleased to see that rural Arizona communities are exploring the use of their own local resources and amenities as ‘classrooms’ to teach these skills that we hope will build interest and skill sets toward careers in science and technology.”

“These creative types of programs that we support are having an impact in schools across Arizona,” said Darcy Renfro, executive director of Science Foundation's STEM Education Initiative. “Teachers and other educators know the importance of keeping today’s students interested in STEM-related courses and this interactive biological environment encourages student learning with their own innate curiosity as the driver.”

(more)

“This is exciting for educators here in Navajo County and we are looking forward to building a high-quality science curriculum utilizing this important resource, the wetlands,” said Lannie Gillespie, agency director for the Navajo County Education Service.

Gillespie’s agency is one of six that were chosen for MSAG funding. Successful proposals vying for funding were submitted to Science Foundation and required to comprehensively address STEM education goals focused on systemic change that have the potential to impact students statewide. The grant is being formally announced on Friday, September 11th at a gathering in Show Low celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the wetlands’ creation.

The wetlands were created in the late 1970’s by the U. S. Forest Service as a natural way to treat effluent from two local communities and have become a point of pride for Navajo County for their function and beauty.

**About Science Foundation Arizona:** Science Foundation Arizona (SFAz) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization initiated in 2006 by the Greater Phoenix Leadership Inc., Southern Arizona Leadership Council and the Flagstaff Forty with the goal to build and strengthen the scientific and education infrastructure in areas of greatest strategic importance to Arizona’s competitiveness in the global economy. These areas comprise advanced communications, biomedicine and sustainable systems that include renewable energies. The state has appropriated monies through the Arizona 21st Century Competitive Initiative Fund and these research grants, totaling \$60 million in the first two years, was leveraged to \$169 million by attracting outside capital. SFAz continues to accelerate Arizona's students’ competency and excellence in STEM education and has to date impacted 54,000 students statewide. SFAz serves as a facilitating bridge between industry and education that ensures a highly skilled Arizona work force as the foundation for a 21st century knowledge-based economy. For more information, visit [www.sfaz.org](http://www.sfaz.org)

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