

Contact: David Godfrey, CCC, 352-317-6302

January 18, 2005

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Marine Experts Lay Course of Action for Saving Rare Sea Turtle

ST CATHERINES ISLAND, GEORGIA—The world's leading sea turtle experts gathered this weekend on St Catherines Island, Georgia, to develop a strategy for saving critically endangered leatherback turtles in the Atlantic Ocean. The four-day retreat was hosted by the St Catherines Island Foundation and the nonprofit Caribbean Conservation Corporation (CCC).

The leatherback is the largest turtle on the planet. The species is threatened by extinction, primarily because of the actions of man. The conservation and research priorities identified on St Catherines Island will help reverse a dramatic decline of the species and help bring it back from the brink of extinction.

“These animals have been around for million of years, yet it is very possible that we could see them disappear in our life-time unless we implement the recommendations outlined at this meeting,” said David Godfrey, Executive Director of Caribbean Conservation Corporation. “Urgent priorities include the reduction of leatherback by-catch in fisheries, stopping the killing of female turtles on nesting beaches and promoting international cooperation in leatherback conservation.”

The recommendations developed at St Catherines Island will be formally presented at the 25th International Sea Turtle Symposium to be held January 18-21, in Savannah, Georgia. The Savannah meeting will host over a thousand researchers and conservationists from over 60 countries. The group assembled on St Catherines Island included leading leatherback experts from ten countries around the Atlantic Ocean.

“The St Catherines Island Foundation was honored to host this important assemblage of global leaders in the conservation of sea turtles,” said David Smith, the Foundation's President. “In keeping with St Catherines Island's long history as a meeting place for global leaders in nature conservation, we are extremely pleased that this unique location has once again played a pivotal role in the saving of a species.”

Leatherback turtles have nearly vanished in the Pacific, mainly as a result of interactions with fishing operations. The experts gathered in a pro-active attempt to prevent a similar occurrence in the Atlantic Ocean. Leatherbacks nest on tropical beaches, but regularly swim as far north as Canada in search for food. Less than two months ago, a leatherback turtle seen on a beach in Costa Rica was stranded dead in Georgia, with large propeller cuts in its back. Leatherback turtles, which can weigh up to 2,000 pounds and reach roughly the size of a Volkswagen Beetle, are particularly threatened by accidental capture in fishing nets and hooks.

St Catherines Island Foundation supports research and conservation projects on Georgia's largest undeveloped barrier island and hosts meetings of nature conservation experts and leaders.

The US-based CCC is the world's oldest sea turtle conservation and research organization. For additional information about leatherback sea turtles or the Caribbean Conservation Corporation, visit www.cccturtle.org.

###