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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Private donations used to protect Apple River Canyon**

*Purchase will conserve important natural area in northwestern Illinois*

**ROCKFORD** — A \$291,000 gift from Gordon and Marea McKeague, Galena, Illinois, and John and Connie McKeague of New Buffalo, Michigan, has been leveraged by The Nature Conservancy and the Natural Land Institute to purchase for long term conservation 155 acres of oak-hickory forest, grassland, and scenic dolomite cliffs along the Apple River that provide important habitat for many unusual plants and animals .

The McKeagues dedicated their gift in memory of their parents, Robert I. and Mary Clark McKeague. “We felt that the best thing to do would be to let their dream of nature be pushed along a little bit,” said Gordon McKeague. “When our folks were younger, they lived in Galena, and we thought it would be a nice place for a preserve.”

“We are very grateful to the McKeagues for their contribution. They have joined many land owners in the past decade who work in collaboration with us and our partners to protect and preserve natural areas for the continued enjoyment and use by future generation,” said Leslee Spraggins, state director for The Nature Conservancy in Illinois.

The purchase of the tract, located near Stockton in JoDaviess County, was arranged by the Natural Land Institute, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, The Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.

Apple River Canyon has been the focus of public and private preservation efforts that go back to the beginning of the movement to create State Parks in Illinois. The Natural Land Institute has been involved with these efforts for more than fifty years.

The newly protected property adjoins Canyon Camp, a heavily forested area owned and managed by the Blackhawk Council Boy Scouts of America, and 1,800 acres of land owned by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

“The acquisition of this important natural area shows what conservation groups can accomplish when we work together,” said Jerry Paulson, executive director of the Natural Land Institute. “We are pleased to be able to join The Nature Conservancy to carry out the wishes of the McKeague family to protect the beautiful Apple River Canyon for everyone to enjoy.”

The property was purchased with the gift from the McKeagues and other private funds. The Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation also provided \$450,000 toward the purchase with additional contributions from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.

The land will be managed by the Natural Land Institute and eventually transferred to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to be developed for public use. It will not be open to the public in the meantime.

The purchase of this land is a key step towards the restoration and protection of the Apple River Canyon Natural Area, one of the goals of the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan, and the Greenways & Trails Plan for JoDaviess County.

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[The Nature Conservancy](#) is a leading conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. To date, the Conservancy and its more than one million members have been responsible for the protection of more than 18 million acres in the United States, including more than 80,000 acres in Illinois, and have helped preserve more than 117 million acres in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific.

[Natural Land Institute](#) is one of the oldest private land conservation organizations in Illinois working since 1958 with private landowners to preserve natural lands for people, plants and animals. During the last fifty years it has helped to preserve more than 14,000 acres of natural land in the state.