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NATIONAL TRUST NAMES THE STATE OF VERMONT ONE OF AMERICA'S 11 MOST ENDANGERED HISTORIC PLACES

Washington, D.C. (May 24, 2004) -- With historic villages and downtowns, working farms, winding back roads, forest-wrapped lakes, spectacular mountain vistas and a strong sense of community, Vermont has a special magic that led National Geographic Traveler magazine to name the state one of "the World's Greatest Destinations." Yet in recent years, this small slice of America has come under tremendous pressure from the onslaught of big-box retail development. The seriousness of this threat led the National Trust to name the state to its list of America's 11 Most Endangered Places in 1993. Back then, Vermont was the only state without a Wal-Mart. Today it has four -- and now faces an invasion of behemoth stores that could destroy much of what makes Vermont Vermont.

To highlight the threat to this vital piece of America's heritage, the **National Trust for Historic Preservation** today named the state of Vermont to its 2004 list of *America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places*.

During the 1990s Wal-Mart located three of its four Vermont stores in existing buildings and kept them relatively modest in size. Now, however, the world's largest company is planning to saturate the state -- which has only 600,000 residents -- with seven new mammoth mega-stores, each with a minimum of 150,000 square feet. Wal-Mart's plans are sure to attract an influx of other big-box retailers. The likely result: degradation of the Green Mountain State's unique sense of place, economic disinvestment in historic downtowns, loss of locally-owned businesses, and an erosion of the sense of community that seems an inevitable by-product of big-box sprawl. With deep regret, the National Trust takes the rare step of re-listing Vermont as one of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places.

"If they are built as proposed, these seven huge new stores will change the character of their communities and the state of Vermont," said Richard Moe, president of the National Trust. "We're not saying

that communities shouldn't allow big-box stores -- but if they choose to do so, they should be aware of the consequences, including the possible impact on jobs, traffic, the environment and locally-owned businesses. New stores complement existing businesses, not devour them -- but there are communities all over America whose downtowns have been devastated by the arrival of big-box retailers. Vermonters shouldn't let that happen in their state."

History: Big-box development typically occurs on the outskirts of town, consuming farmland and open space, fueling sprawl and other problems associated with insensitive expansion. Communities often welcome these large stores in the hope that they will bring economic benefit. Too often, however, the stores bring hidden costs and cause significant economic and social harm.

Threat: The distinctive characteristics that define Vermont -- historic towns, villages and rural landscapes -- could be lost if sprawl-like development is allowed to occur in a haphazard, out-of-scale, land-consuming manner. The one-size-fits-all big-box "template" has proven to be detrimental to communities across the United States because of its negative economic and environmental impact on historic downtowns and local businesses. The size and design of these stores often overwhelm their surroundings, and impersonal corporate identity too often trumps community character.

Solution: The arrival of big-box sprawl often fostered by retailers such as Wal-Mart has been resisted by increasing numbers of communities that are determined to prevent or minimize the loss of their open space and the erosion of the economic vitality of their traditional business districts. People want and should have easy access to basic goods at low prices -- but they also have the right to determine how their communities should grow and what they want to preserve and protect. At the very least, communities should accept big-box development with their eyes open and understand its long-term costs. Some big-box stores have adapted to local standards and worked to fit in gracefully with existing commercial districts. Some have even located in recycled vacant properties in existing downtowns. Vermonters should learn from what has happened elsewhere and persuade Wal-Mart and other large retailers to adapt the way they do business so as to enhance existing communities. Wal-Mart should change to accommodate Vermont, not the other way around.

America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places has identified more than 160 threatened one-of-a-kind historic treasures since 1988. While listing does not ensure protection of a site or guarantee funding, the designation has been a powerful tool for raising awareness and rallying resources to save endangered sites from every region of the country. Whether these sites are urban districts or rural landscapes, Native American landmarks or 20th-century sports arenas, entire communities or single buildings, the list spotlights historic places across America that are threatened by neglect, insufficient funds, inappropriate development or insensitive public policy.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a private, nonprofit membership organization dedicated to protecting the irreplaceable. Recipient of the National Humanities medal, the Trust provides leadership, education and advocacy to save America's diverse historic places and revitalize communities. Its Washington, DC

headquarters staff, six regional offices and 25 historic sites work with the Trust's 200,000 members and thousands of local community groups in all 50 states. For more information visit: www.nationaltrust.org. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036. NTHP Communications: 202-588-6141.

For more information about *Historic Vermont*, to subscribe or to unsubscribe to the email version, or to submit something for publication please contact Meg Campbell, Editor. ptv@sover.net

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