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National Association of Regional Councils Recognizes *Regional Centers of Excellence* Houston-Galveston Area Council and Land-of-Sky Regional Council Receive Awards for Green Infrastructure Outreach

Washington, DC (August 18, 2010) – The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC), in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, recognized two green infrastructure programs, which will receive grants and serve as national models of land conservation and natural resource protection: the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) in Houston, TX and the Land-of-Sky Regional Council (LOSRC) in Asheville, NC. As *Regional Centers of Excellence (RCEs)*, the organizations will carry out peer-to-peer communication projects, present at a workshop at NARC's 44th Annual Conference and Exhibition in San Diego in June 2011 and share their work through *Green Regions*, NARC's public awareness campaign focused on the environment.

"For the second year in a row, we are excited to recognize the accomplishments of distinguished regional planning organizations and provide additional funding to expand their peer-to-peer outreach efforts," said NARC President Jim Townsend, Webster County Judge/Executive. "Both H-GAC and LOSRC have demonstrated their abilities in planning and implementing regional green infrastructure projects, as well as their capability to communicate the keys of their success in a way that will support and promote similar projects at the regional level."

H-GAC – With a long history of successfully implementing and coordinating environmental programs, H-GAC's most recent Eco-Logical project promotes livability through integrating the region's long-range environmental and transportation planning. The project, supported by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Galveston Bay Estuary Program and many regional partners, led to the development of a regional decision support system, an interactive geographic information systems (GIS)-based mapping tool that integrates long-range transportation and environmental planning to identify and conserve high-value environmental resources in the region. As a 2010 RCE, H-GAC will expand its project-specific website, hold a webinar series and meet with stakeholder groups within and around its region.

"H-GAC is honored to be chosen as one of this year's *Regional Centers of Excellence*," said Jack Steele, Executive Director, Houston-Galveston Area Council. "We look forward to working with NARC and promoting the importance of integrating regional decision making into green infrastructure planning."

LOSRC – LOSRC has been working with a multi-disciplinary group of leaders, representing over 40 organizations, from across its four-county region to develop a regional framework for conservation and development. The project brings together data and expertise from public, private, and non-profit sources, resulting in a series of maps, GIS datasets, information and other tools that can be used to help guide land use decisions across the region. The goal is to develop and provide a valuable set of resources that can help local governments, land trusts, developers, and landowners make land use and development decisions that will bring the regional green infrastructure network design into reality on the ground. As a 2010 RCE, LOSRC will reach out to fellow councils of government and local governments in the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area and adjacent to the Blue Ridge Parkway, local and regional land trusts and other interested non-profits.

“LOSRC is honored to have the opportunity to highlight, through the *Regional Centers of Excellence* program, the important work we’re carrying out at the regional level,” said Joe McKinney, Executive Director, Land-of-Sky Regional Council. “We have made it a priority to partner with a variety of public and private organizations to ensure informed land use decisions are a vital part of the planning process. We welcome the opportunity to partner with NARC on this project and share our information with fellow Councils across the country.”

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About the National Association of Regional Councils

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) serves as the national voice for regionalism by advocating for regional cooperation as the most effective way to address a variety of community planning and development opportunities and issues. NARC’s member organizations are composed of multiple local governments that work together to serve American communities – large and small, urban and rural. In 2008, NARC launched the first of four public awareness campaigns – Green Regions, Mobile Regions, Build Regions and Secure Regions. For additional information, please visit www.NARC.org or www.GreenRegions.org.

About the U.S. Forest Service

The U.S Forest Service manages over 193 million acres of National Forests, has the world’s largest forestry research organization, and facilitates the conservation of state and privately owned forest land across the country. The Forest Service promotes the use of green infrastructure to help conserve and manage public and private forest land that spans the urban to rural continuum.

About the Houston-Galveston Area Council

The H-GAC region is home to over six million residents, making it the sixth largest metro region in the nation. The Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the 8-county Transportation Management Area (TMA) as well as the designated Council of Government (COG) for the 13-county region. H-GAC is also the state designated water quality planning agency. For additional information, please visit www.h-gac.com.

About the Land-of-Sky Regional Council

Land-of-Sky’s four-county region is located in western North Carolina, in the Southern Appalachian mountains. The City of Asheville is at the center of our region and is the largest city in western North Carolina, with a current population of about 70,000. The region’s population was about 200,000 in 1960, 380,000 in 2008 and is expected to approach 500,000 in 2030. Land-of-Sky Regional Council (LOSRC) is a Council of Governments (COG) that staffs the French Broad River MPO and the Land-of-Sky RPO. It is also a Local Development District (LDD) for the ARC and an Economic Development District (EDD) for EDA. For additional information, please visit www.landofsky.org.

About Green Infrastructure

Green infrastructure is strategically planned and managed networks of natural lands, working landscapes and other open spaces that conserve ecosystem values and functions and provide associated benefits to human populations. Green infrastructure includes woods, meadows, forests, wetlands, farmland, animal habitat, etc., and plays an important role in reducing air pollution, filtering stormwater, maintaining ecological balance, and increasing the effectiveness of traditional infrastructure. Please see [NARC’s Green Regions Campaign website](#), the [U.S. Forest Service’s Urban and Community Forestry website](#) and the [Conservation Fund’s Green Infrastructure website](#) for more information.