



Green Infrastructure Issue Brief

ISSUE:

The **National Association of Regional Councils (NARC)** has a long history of work in educating regional councils on green infrastructure and promoting its incorporation into integrated regional planning activities. Green infrastructure offers an opportunity for regional planning organizations to harness the power of nature to increase the capacity and performance of traditional infrastructure. Trees, green roofs, rain gardens and other green infrastructure have a long history of use in lessening the load on traditional stormwater management systems by allowing rain water to bypass these traditional grey infrastructure systems, lessen polluted runoff from impervious surfaces and naturally filter runoff directly into the ground.

BACKGROUND:

Broadly, green infrastructure is the network of natural lands, working landscapes and other open spaces that are strategically planned and managed to conserve their ecological functions, while also providing associated benefits to human populations. Green infrastructure can be developed and maintained on a variety of scales, however, regional work in green infrastructure is particularly influential because of the nature of green infrastructure – crossing multiple local jurisdictions – and responsibilities of regional planning organizations – often including regional transportation planning, regional land use visioning and water or wastewater treatment or planning.

Many regional councils have integrated green infrastructure planning into their long- and short- range planning processes by identifying key regional green infrastructure features and developing conservation plans or specific tools for evaluating a potential transportation project's impact on the region's green infrastructure. In 2009, NARC, with the support of the US Forest Service, created the *Regional Centers of Excellence* initiative and named the Bay-Lake Regional Planning Commission (BLRPC) and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) as *Regional Centers of Excellence in Green Infrastructure*. These two organizations received small grants to engage in communication and information-sharing activities to promote regional green infrastructure planning to regional councils across the country.

NARC continues to promote green infrastructure planning and peer-to-peer learning as an effective way to capture the important benefits of a region's natural features – including the economic benefits of preserving grey infrastructure, increasing property values and creating green jobs, among the other benefits such as improving public health, beautifying recreation areas and decreasing urban heat island effect.

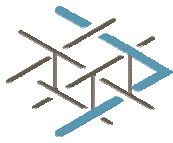
CURRENT LEGISLATION:

In December, Rep. Donna Edwards (D-MD), Russ Carnahan (D-MO) and Steve Driehaus (D-OH) introduced the *Green Infrastructure for Clean Water Act of 2009* (HR 4202) to establish centers of excellence for green infrastructure, provide grants for green infrastructure planning and development and implementation, and to strengthen and expand the US Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) green infrastructure program. The bill promotes EPA's water and wastewater centric definition and view of green infrastructure and provides grants to State or local governments, or local, regional or other entities that manage stormwater, water resources or waste water resources.

This legislation includes authorization for grants of up to \$200,000 for green infrastructure planning and development and grants of up to \$3 million for green infrastructure implementation. It limits the definition of green infrastructure, as well as limits potential grant recipients to State or local governments, or local, regional or other entities that manage stormwater, water resources or waste water resources.

The bill also re-creates "Centers of Excellence in Green Infrastructure." NARC has already developed and successfully implemented *Regional Centers of Excellence*. This bill would create more "Centers of Excellence" to conduct research, develop materials, provide information and technical assistance, collaborate with stakeholders, promote training, evaluate policy and regulatory issues, and coordinate to support green infrastructure planning and implementation.

Finally, this bill proposes to expand and enhance EPA's Office of Water green infrastructure program. This expansion would provide additional support; however, it does not reconcile the green infrastructure differences across federal agencies. EPA would be required to promote a Green Infrastructure Portfolio Standard, similar to the energy efficiency Renewable Portfolio Standards. The current language requires collaboration with State and local water resource managers to establish these goals, potentially excluding regional planning organizations as stakeholders.



NARC

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NARC PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS:

PARTNERSHIPS

- Support the federal-state-local government partnership in coordination with regional planning organizations to promote the use of green infrastructure planning and implementation.
- Encourage coordination among federal government interagency use and definition of “green infrastructure.”

FUNDING

- Provide access to federal funding and authority for councils of government (COGs) and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) to carry out both green infrastructure planning and implementation of green infrastructure projects, whether they manage a region’s stormwater, water resources or wastewater resources directly or support the local and regional planning organizations that do so.

PROGRAM

- Recognize the importance of working with established regional planning organizations for cost effective, efficient and far reaching green infrastructure planning and implementation efforts.
- Create a consistent and broad definition of “green infrastructure” to include both water treatment-related and other green infrastructure features that are strategically planned and managed to conserve their ecological functions while also providing associated benefits to human populations.
- Continue to establish “Regional Green Infrastructure Centers of Excellence,” expanding on NARC’s definition and success, that conduct research; develop materials; provide information and technical assistance; collaborate with stakeholders; promote green infrastructure training; evaluate policy and regulatory issues; and, coordinate with one another to support green infrastructure planning and implementation at the local, regional and state levels.

Additional Notes on the Legislation:

Supporting Organizations

The Center for Neighborhood Technology has worked with a coalition of conservation groups (National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA), the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), American Rivers, the American Public Works Association (APWA), the Water Environment Federation (WEF), Clean Water Action, and the Association of State and Interstate Water Pollution Control Administrators (ASIWPCA) on developing the proposed legislation.

Current List of Cosponsors

Rep Blumenauer, Earl [OR-3] - 12/14/2009

Rep Carnahan, Russ [MO-3] - 12/3/2009

Rep Driehaus, Steve [OH-1] - 12/3/2009

Rep Filner, Bob [CA-51] - 2/2/2010

Rep Frank, Barney [MA-4] - 1/26/2010

Rep Grijalva, Raul M. [AZ-7] - 1/26/2010

Rep Hodes, Paul W. [NH-2] - 1/26/2010

Rep Holt, Rush D. [NJ-12] - 2/2/2010

Rep Jackson Lee, Sheila [TX-18] - 1/26/2010

Rep Jackson, Jesse L., Jr. [IL-2] - 1/26/2010

Rep Kucinich, Dennis J. [OH-10] - 12/14/2009

Rep Maloney, Carolyn B. [NY-14] - 1/26/2010

Rep Moore, Gwen [WI-4] - 1/26/2010

Rep Norton, Eleanor Holmes [DC] - 12/16/2009

Rep Tonko, Paul D. [NY-21] - 1/26/2010

Rep Van Hollen, Chris [MD-8] - 12/16/2009

All actions

12/3/2009: Referred to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, and in addition to the Committee on Science and Technology, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned.

12/3/2009: Referred to House Transportation and Infrastructure

12/4/2009: Referred to the Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment.

12/3/2009: Referred to House Science and Technology

12/24/2009: Referred to the Subcommittee on Energy and Environment.