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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Fresh Coast Named as Conservation Innovation Grant Recipient by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack**

**CHICAGO, ILLINOIS** – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced today that Fresh Coast Capital is the recipient of a \$940,800 grant to install a pioneering green stormwater infrastructure project in Peoria, Illinois. This project is part of a \$26.6 million investment by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) into projects that will spur innovative conservation initiatives.

Fresh Coast designed the grant proposal in partnership with the City of Peoria and partners AKRF and the Gifts in the Moment (gitm) Foundation. The program will install absorptive plant and tree-based landscapes to improve water quality in the Illinois River. In particular, these “working landscapes” will include stormwater forests, as well as agriculture and native floriculture rain gardens on vacant and right-of-way land to form a complete streetscape of “green fingers” in a Peoria neighborhood. The successful demonstration of these plantings will allow Fresh Coast to expand its model with privately funded impact investment capital in cities facing the dual issues of land vacancy and stormwater.

“This grant provides the opportunity to develop a scalable and investable solution to vacant land and stormwater through a community-based approach. We are excited to be working with innovators like the City of Peoria and our other partners to begin the implementation phase,” said CEO and Co-Founder Nicole Chavas. “Our partnership with the

City of Peoria will help the City meet its EPA requirements while also providing fantastic benefits for the local community,” said Director of Ecosystem Services and Co-founder Laura Brenner Kimes. Lead engineering partner AKRF added: “we are proud to be part of this partnership because it will translate big concepts like Community Based Public Private Partnerships into investor-ready green infrastructure projects with neighborhood scale social and environmental benefits,” said Shandor Szalay, Senior Vice President and Director of AKRF’s Water Resources Practice.

In Peoria, local reception has been very positive. "I am excited by the potential that the collaborative effort of installing green infrastructure for revenue generation and stormwater management offers the City for its future community development, economic development, and stormwater compliance,” said City Manager Patrick Urich. “This project will create strong relationships among the Peoria community through microenterprise operations of agricultural food products and floriculture sited on green stormwater infrastructure. We are excited to work alongside Fresh Coast Capital to develop and train local community members to care for and harvest edible food crops and cut flowers from installed raingardens," said Denise Urycki, Co-Director of The gitm Foundation.

The City of Peoria has a combined sewer system that causes sewer outflows during large storm events into the Illinois river. The City is negotiating a consent decree for its combined sewer system that, if approved, would allow for the nation’s first 100% green stormwater infrastructure compliance plan. The City is also one of 20 cities around the world participating in Bloomberg Philanthropies’ Innovation Teams program. The program aims to improve the capacity of City Halls to effectively design and implement new approaches that improve citizens’ lives. Innovation teams function as in-house innovation consultants, moving from one

city priority to the next. Using Bloomberg Philanthropies' tested Innovation Delivery approach, i-teams help city leaders and staff through a data-driven process to assess problems, generate responsive new interventions, develop partnerships, and deliver measurable results.

This announcement expands Fresh Coast's areas of operation to Peoria, Illinois from current operations in: Battle Creek and Flint, Michigan; Youngstown, Ohio; Gary and Elkhart, Indiana; and Kansas City and St Louis, Missouri.

Many urban centers across the Midwest have experienced decline in industry and population since the 1960s that has led to areas of high vacancy. "Active, green reuse of vacant properties is a powerful antidote that has been shown to immediately stabilize and even improve property values, lower crime and improve health and environmental outcomes," said Co-Founder and Director of Community Relations, April Mendez.

**Fresh Coast Capital** was founded in 2014 with a mission of revitalizing vacant land. Co-founders Nicole Chavas, April Mendez, and Laura Brenner Kimes bring a unique combination of 35+ years in financial, environmental consulting, and community development sectors.

Additional information available at: <http://www.freshcoastcapital.com>.

**AKRF, Inc.** specializes in environmental, planning, and engineering consulting services and is a national leader in sustainable water management and green infrastructure program development and implementation. Additional information available at: <http://www.akrf.com>.

**Peoria, Illinois** is one of 20 cities around the world participating in Bloomberg Philanthropies' Innovation Teams program. For more information on the City of Peoria's Innovation Team, please visit [www.peoriagov.org/innovation](http://www.peoriagov.org/innovation).

**The USDA-NRCS Conservation Innovation Grants** are competitive grants that stimulate the development and adoption of innovative approaches and technologies for conservation on

agricultural lands. Through CIG, NRCS partners with public and private entities to accelerate technology transfer and adopt promising technologies. Since 2009, \$173 million in funding has been awarded to 414 national projects. Official NRCS press release at:

<http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdamediafb?contentid=2016/09/0192.xml&printable=true&contentidonly=true>. Additional information available at:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig>

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