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## **Coastal Recreation Area Concept to Be Led By John L. Nau, III and James A. Baker, III**

Goal to Combine Recreation, Economic Development and Flood Control

Houston - Local business leader John L. Nau, III and former Secretary of State James A. Baker, III announced today the formation of a steering committee and a partners coalition to help establish a nationally significant coastal recreation area as part of a four-county approach to economic development, hurricane flood abatement, conservation and recreation. The coastal recreation area concept is proposed as part of a hurricane flood abatement program being developed by the SSPEED Center at Rice University in association with the Houston-based non-profit organization Houston Wilderness.

The steering committee will be chaired by John Nau, who chaired the national Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and also served as chairman of the Texas Historical Commission. Secretary Baker will serve as the steering committee's honorary chair. As a first step, a group of local, state and national leaders will be invited to serve on a steering committee. The steering committee will explore and shape the concept, and garner support from the broad array of decision makers necessary to realize a national recreation area along the Texas coast that boasts significant outdoor recreation amenities. Concurrently, the major stakeholders will be invited to serve on a partners coalition that will explore the composition and function of the governing body for the area. Both groups will engage citizens and organizations throughout the area as partners in this dialogue.

"Creation of a nationally significant recreation area offers a unique and important opportunity to support economic development and flood abatement," Mr. Nau said. "I look forward to working with coastal community leaders and citizen groups to explore the potential of a coastal recreation area to provide economic benefits and enhance community safety."

The steering committee will explore how to structure a local, state, and federal partnership to maximize the benefits of a 130-mile area along the coast identified in a SSPEED Center report as having significant potential to reduce impacts to Texas communities from severe storm events.

"A coastal recreation area will be a major plus for the region," Secretary Baker said. "We are taking care to insure that only willing landowners are part of this designation and that there will be no new regulations or restrictions on coastal landowners who do not want to participate."

The stretch of coastline extending from High Island in Chambers County through Galveston and Brazoria Counties to the Colorado delta in Matagorda County includes several world-class bird-watching destinations and offers great opportunities for coastal kayaking and hiking, in addition to hunting and fishing. It also includes significant historic sites such as the historic district of the City of Galveston, various plantations in Brazoria County, and numerous Civil War era sites.

“I am excited about the potential for combining recreation and historic places as economic development magnets,” Mr. Nau said. It is time for our natural and cultural wealth to be widely recognized.”

The national recreation area concept was identified by the SSPEED Center at Rice University under funding provided by The Houston Endowment. The SSPEED Center project proposed the idea as part of a structural and non-structural hurricane flood abatement framework. The concept is designed to offer flood protection, while also being capable of implementation in these difficult economic times.

Brazoria County Commissioner Dude Payne, who along with others has been discussing this concept since January, said, “I am very interested in pursuing the implementation of a national recreation area because I believe it will result in measurable benefits not only to Brazoria County but to the surrounding region.”

“The coastal recreation area is a very different type of project for me – and allows me to give something back to my community,” Secretary Baker said. “I think this recreation area concept has the potential to transform the image of our region—to open the eyes of the nation to our treasures while stimulating economic development and assisting in flood protection. It can’t get much better than that.”

Once assembled during the coming months, the steering committee and partner coalition will review concepts for the design and implementation of a national recreation area. “In the end,” Mr. Nau said, “we hope to bring a winning solution to the region—one that will make us all proud.” For more information about the concept please visit <http://houstonwilderness.org/index.php/NationalRecreationArea/index2>.

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