



Contact: Joe McKinney, Executive Director
202.624.7806 | jmckinney@nado.org

For Immediate Release
November 9, 2015

**East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission Receives
National Association of Development Organizations 2015 Innovation Award**

WASHINGTON, DC – The East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission, based in Anniston, Alabama received a 2015 Innovation Award from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) Research Foundation for *Tour East Alabama*. Accepting the "2015 NADO Innovation Award" on behalf of the Tour East Alabama organization were Mary Patchunka-Smith, TMP President; Tammy Power 1st Vice President and Cotina Terry 2nd Vice President of Tour East Alabama.

The Tour East Alabama region consists of eight counties in East Central Alabama (Calhoun, Chambers, Clay, Cleburne, Coosa, Randolph, Talladega and Tallapoosa), a predominantly rural area. The region covered by this project has historically been dependent on the textile industry. This industry has dwindled over the last few decades in the aftermath of the NAFTA and other trade agreements. With agriculture producing fewer and fewer jobs, and the textile jobs moving offshore, the populations of our rural towns have been shifting to urban areas where jobs were more plentiful. Our rural towns have been disappearing.

Tour East Alabama is a volunteer organization. For the past 7+ years local Chambers of Commerce, Economic Development Councils, Cooperative Extension Services, State Parks, the U.S. Forest Service and other organizations have been educating the local communities on how to use tourism as an economic development tool. Tour East Alabama recognizes that the region has the natural and cultural resources to become a successful tourist destination, creating a new job engine for the East Alabama region. As resources have allowed, Tour East Alabama has been educating local communities about the value of the tax dollars and jobs that tourism can bring to their communities through new and expanding businesses that form the basis on which tourism can thrive.

"East Alabama has so much to offer without all the rat race from the big cities, with plenty of fun and entertaining things to do during the spring, summer, fall and winter. There's something to do for everyone. From the highest point in Alabama Cheaha State Park to the Fastest Track in NASCAR at the Talladega Superspeedway to the nearly endless lakes and rivers found throughout, you'll discover natural resources like nowhere else. Tourists don't care about city limits and county lines. Tour East Alabama has erased those city limits and county lines and made the 8 counties in East Alabama a vibrant tourist destination" said Mary Patchunka-Smith, TMP President of Tour East Alabama.

Travelers spent \$11.8 billion and were responsible for 167,273 jobs in 2014 in Alabama. This represents

a 7.3% increase compared to 2013 in traveler spending on hotels, restaurants, shopping and transportation. The tourism industry is economic development. Tourism and the jobs it creates cannot be outsourced to another country. *2014 Statistics from the Alabama Tourism Department.*

Thanks go out to the University of Alabama Center for Economic Development, Appalachian Regional Commission, Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, Alabama Tourism Department, elected officials and all the many volunteers throughout the region that support the concept that "Tourism is economic development."

NADO is a Washington, DC-based association that promotes programs and policies that strengthen local governments, communities, and economies through regional cooperation, program delivery, and comprehensive strategies. The association's Innovation Awards program recognizes regional development organizations and partnering organizations for improving the economic and community competitiveness of our nation's regions and local communities. Award-winning projects were honored during NADO's 2015 Annual Training Conference, held October 24-27 in New Orleans, LA.

"For nearly 30 years, NADO's Innovation Award has provided regional development organizations the opportunity to be recognized for their hard work and dedication to promoting economic development in rural and small metropolitan communities across the country. Building on the unique strengths and challenges of each region and community, award recipients continue to promote sustainable economic growth not only now, but for many years to come. And I am pleased to announce that this year over 100 regional development organizations were selected to receive NADO's 2015 Innovation Award," said NADO 2014-2015 Board President Terry Bobrowski, Executive Director of the East Tennessee Development District in Alcoa, TN.

For more information about the award-winning project, contact Donna Fathke at the East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission at (256) 237-6741 or Mary Patchunka-Smith, TMP President of Tour East Alabama 256-276-0365 email toureastalabama@gmail.com
www.toureastalabama.com.

###

Since 1967 the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) has provided advocacy, education, networking, and research for the national network of 540 regional development organizations. NADO members provide professional, programmatic and technical assistance to over 2,300 counties and 15,000 municipalities.