

Board Meeting of the Environmental Council of Sacramento (ECOS) Meeting

Held Tuesday, March 23, 2021 at 6 pm via Zoom

FEATURED SPEAKER

John Roberts, Executive Director, Natomas Basin Conservancy

ATTENDEES:

Oscar Balaguer, 350 Sacramento
Chris Brown, Sacramento Climate Coalition
May Lin Chang, Architect, HGA Architects and Engineers
Heather Fargo, former Mayor of Sacramento
Mike Garabedian
Cheryle Hodge, City of Sacramento, Planner for New Growth
Janet Koster, Sacramento Native Plant Society
Barbara Leary, Sierra Club Sacramento Group
Steve Letterly
Stacey McKinley
Kevin McRae
Jeffrey Norton
Marko Pavlovic, Sierra Club Sacramento Group
Owen Routt
Megan Shumway,
Muriel Strand
Betsy Weiland, SARA
Molly Wright, SMAQMD
Developer for Grand Park development

ECOS

Gabriel Balensiefer
Rob Burness
John Deeter
Jon Ellison
Sandra Hall
Susan Herre
Chelsea Kelly-Reif
Margaret Loehr
Ron Maertz
Michael O'Sullivan
Ralph Propper
Alex Reagan
Quincy Stivers
Sean Wirth
Earl Withycombe

- 1) Greetings & Introductions
- 2) The Jan 2021 minutes and today's agenda were approved.
- 3) Natomas Basin Habitat Conservation Plan, John Roberts, Executive Director, Natomas Basin Conservancy

Rob Burness, ECOS Habitat Committee Co-Chair introduced our speaker. John Roberts is the Executive Director of the Natomas Basin Conservancy, charged with fulfilling the requirements of the Natomas Basin Habitat Conservation Plan (NBHCP) -- Sacramento's original habitat conservation plan.

John Roberts discussed the accomplishments and challenges faced by the NBHCP. See powerpoint (slides 1, 2, and 3 were prepared by Susan Herre of ECOS; the rest of the slides were prepared by John Roberts):

<https://www.ecosacramento.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2021/03/210323a-Natomas-Basin-Habitat-Conservation-Plan-presentation.pdf>

- The purpose of the NBHCP is to promote biological conservation along with economic development and the continuation of agriculture within the Natomas Basin. The NBHCP establishes a multi-species conservation program to mitigate the expected loss of habitat values and incidental take of protected species that would result from urban development, operation of irrigation and drainage systems, and rice farming.
- The maps on slides 1, 2, and 3 show the boundaries for the counties and the City, the Urban Services Boundary (USB), the pending annexation by the City of the "handle" with the "pan" remaining for now in Sacramento County, and developments both existing and proposed. In Sacramento County the Grand Park development is fully outside of the USB and the Upper Westside development proposes to move the USB. The Sutter Pointe development includes approximately 7,528 acres of land in south Sutter County. Metro Air Park is being developed, with mitigation. Greenbriar being developed in the City (and outside the NBHCP.)
- The HCP process is described on the Blue Flow Chart. The NB Conservancy serves as the plan operator, a public benefit corporation 10 members, small staff (4), Dept of Fish and Wildlife and many other partners. The NB Conservancy acquires land, commits it to functional mitigation, assigns it a land use designation, commits to manage it in perpetuity. To acquire land, approvals are needed from State, feds, and certain criteria must be met. For every acre of development, .5 acres are to be conserved.
- Two primary protected species are the Giant Garter Snake and Swainson's Hawk.
- Funding comes from mitigation fees, rent for agricultural properties, and investment income.
- A serious concern is that there may not be enough available mitigation land to implement the NBHCP. Other concerns are increase in invasive weeds and crime on mitigation lands, among others.

Questions:

- 1) RB: If half of 8,000 acres have been protected, and half need protection, what if what's left is not enough to acquire, and land prices keep increasing. Should county/city be required to acquire necessary lands through condemnation?
 - a) JR: It is not certain that we can guarantee enough acres to acquire and maintain, and the price of acreage is going up. This is a challenge. Condemnation as an approach was rejected because contrary to CA law, the court said nearly ten years ago that eminent domain authority cannot be used for mitigation lands. Also, for some parcels designated for development, such as near the airport, the NBHCP is not able to acquire mitigation land.
- 2) BW: how does water compete with other concerns?
 - a) JR: HCP is a substantial shareholder of the Natomas Central Mutual Water Company. The State and feds have intervened and required diversions from agriculture to wildlife. We get water rights for the Conservancy and put in groundwater wells for marsh back-up. This is a success story.
- 3) BL: Are you able to make pieces of mitigation land contiguous – this is needed for wildlife.
 - a) JR: yes, that's important. US DOJ has said same thing to HCP, that fragmentation of land parcels should be minimized.

4) CURRENT BUSINESS

Status of Sacramento County Climate Action Plans (CAP) Ralph Propper and Susan Herre

The public draft was released on March 8 with comments due April 9. Yesterday a meeting was held, led by Sac Citizens Climate Lobby (Edith Thacher, Jill Peterson), including 350 Sac, Sacramento Climate Coalition (C Brown), Sierra Club Sacramento, SacEV, and UC Davis scientist Tom Suchanek, and ECOS, to share draft comments including:

1. Disappointment the CAP is shooting for 2030 to meet the SB32 target and not carbon neutrality as pledged in the County's Climate Emergency Declaration (CED.)
2. Concern the CAP is too reliant on SMUD fully electrifying its energy sources by 2030, per its CED.
3. Disappointment that CAP does not employ land use patterns ... compact dev around transit, smart growth etc. as a GHG emissions reducing strategy.
4. Disappointed that emissions from on-road vehicles shows not much change due to mitigation measures in the CAP between now and 2030
5. The County says this is a starter CAP, and that as state laws and regs change, so will it change. County is starting to discuss updating its 2030 General Plan, and they say it will emphasize their infill program.

5) REPORTS

Land Use Committee Report, Robert Meagher, Co-Chairs

- On March 8, the LU Committee hosted the Center for Urban Displacement from UC Berkeley. This group shared their research into displacement caused by investment, and shared strategies for combatting displacement. They shared their mapping tool that shows the propensity for displacement through rising housing prices. They also shared their report called Urban Displacement Project: Building a National Narrative of Anti-Displacement Strategies
https://www.urbandisplacement.org/sites/default/files/images/building_a_national_narrative_october_2020-converted.pdf

Transportation, Air Quality and Climate Change (TAQCC) Committee Report, John Deeter, Chair

- Update on CapCity Freeway redecking, widening. ECOS is considering filing a lawsuit on the basis that Caltrans is piecemealing parts of a large project that is likely to cause induced demand.

Habitat 2020 Committee Report, Sean Wirth and Rob Burness, Co-Chairs

- The Water Committee is working on the Water Forum – groundwater issues. Habitat Committee is still dealing with the possible location of a hospital in Elk Grove adjacent to a national wildlife preserve and important agricultural lands.

Treasurer's Report, Earl Withycombe, Treasurer

Director of Operations Report, Alexandra Reagan

- Update on Sacramento Investment Without Displacement
- Update on EOY Awards. Video roll out on Earth Day April 22. Interviews done, need to tie them together...
 - Anne Stausboll, Climate Hero, chaired the Mayors' Commission on Climate Change
 - Moiz Mir, Early Career Environmentalist
 - Brandon Rose, Environmentalist of the Year
 - Dr. Michelle Stevens, Environmentalist of the Year

President's Report, Susan Herre, filling in for Ralph Propper, ECOS Board President

- Update on Green Means Go program from SACOG to fund infrastructure in infill areas