

# HISTORY OF ECOS

The Environmental Council of Sacramento (ECOS) was formed in 1971 when environmental leaders in Sacramento came together to create a visionary forum and an action-oriented coalition for the region. An informal alliance of Sacramento area environmental activists and organizations had come together to campaign for California Proposition 18, which would have raised the gas tax and fees on automobiles in order to use some of that money to support mass transit. Although Prop 18 was defeated, these leaders were pleased at how they had worked together, and so they created ECOS to coordinate the activities of their member organizations.

Throughout its 50+ year history, ECOS has actively addressed our region's many environmental challenges. These include air and water quality, water supply sustainability and flooding, land use, urban sprawl, habitat destruction, transportation, and energy. These challenges have been greatly exacerbated by the tripling of the Sacramento metropolitan area's population since 1971: from 652,000 to over two million. From the start, ECOS has used the strengths of its membership, both organizational and individual, to advocate in administrative, planning, and legislative processes; and to make effective use of the courts to advance its positions on regional sustainability issues in support of its goals.

ECOS' strength has always been coalition building and bringing its resources to a broad range of issues by partnering with other groups. It has had a strong partner in the local Sierra Club, the largest grass-

roots environmental organization in the region. ECOS' leaders have often become Sierra Club leaders and vice versa. ECOS has also worked closely with the American Lung Association of Sacramento-Emigrant Trails (formerly Sacramento-Emigrant Trails Tuberculosis and Health Association, now Breathe California-Sacramento Region). These partnerships, and many others with both large and small environmental groups, have played out in numerous important campaigns and lawsuits, in which ECOS has played a vital role in orchestrating local collaboration to enhance the effectiveness of the environmental movement in Sacramento.

A prime example of how this collaboration has worked is Habitat 2020. Formed outside of ECOS in 1991, this coalition of nine groups concerned about wildlife eventually became the ECOS Habitat 2020 Committee in the early 2000s. Habitat 2020 works to protect the lands, waters, wildlife and native plants in the region, and has developed the California Heartland Project -- a comprehensive conservation plan for the Sacramento region.



In the 1970s, the following organizations joined ECOS: the Sacramento-Emigrant Trails Tuberculosis and Health Association, the Sierra Club, the Ecology Information Center, the American Association of University Women, the League of Women Voters, the Audubon Society, and the local Medical Society.

During the 1970's, ECOS began formulating and pursuing innovative land use principles with local planners and developers, as well as transportation strategies for the region. In two of its first projects, ECOS:

- Advocated for a controversial urban planning policy intended to control sprawl – the Urban Limit Line. This was designed to set geographic restrictions in Sacramento County for new construction. Although Sacramento County did not then put an urban limit line into its General Plan Update, ECOS helped increase awareness of the concept by the community which later served to re-shape county planning.
- Joined the local Lung Association's campaign to end freeway building in Sacramento, and to redirect funds set aside for a freeway northeast of the central city to the development of transit.

In addition, ECOS:

- Successfully advocated for the establishment of the American River Parkway.
- After passage of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, worked to preserve the Stone Lakes area and for the protection of Bushy Lake in the CalExpo floodplain – for the benefit of regional habitat and wildlife. The Bushy Lake Protection Plan was passed in 1976, to make management of the area consistent with the American River Parkway Plan.
- Promoted the adoption of a Sacramento County Natural Streams Policy to avoid concrete channelizing of suburban creeks.
- Pushed for the Sacramento Metropolitan Utility District (SMUD) to close its Rancho Seco nuclear power plant and for the adoption of a County energy conservation ordinance.
- Worked to ensure the continued success of a regional Earth Day.
- Established the Environmentalist of the Year awards to recognize individuals, organizations and movements that advance preservation and sustainability of our environment.



**In the 1980s**, ECOS continued to thrive and was incorporated in 1982.

During this decade the region continued to grow, bringing many important land use and air quality issues to the forefront. To address these, ECOS:

- Sought to prevent the urbanization of the deep floodplain and endangered species habitat of Natomas, as the City of Sacramento expanded north of the central city into North and South Natomas. Also advocated for smart growth principles in the South Natomas Community Plan.
- Supported Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) efforts to develop a new plan to address our region's rapid growth.
- Continued advocacy for an Urban Boundary Line (formerly the Urban Limit Line).
- Successfully pushed for creation of the independent Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District (SMAQMD).
- Advocated for increased local commitments to cleaner fueled vehicles, light rail, and transit.
- Supported establishment of the Cleaner Air Partnership to join business, local government and the environmental community in finding win/win solutions to Sacramento's air quality problem.
- Celebrated the successful start of light rail service in 1986, the result of years of advocacy by ECOS, our local Lung Association, and Modern Transit Society.

In addition:

- Celebrated SMUD's closure of its Rancho Seco nuclear power plant in 1989, culminating ECOS' long-term advocacy for its closure, and leading SMUD to focus on energy conservation and renewable energy.

- Campaigned to protect Stone Lakes from grazing, which resulted in the establishment of the Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge in 1992, a major contribution to open space and Pacific flyway protection near the Sacramento River Delta.



**In the 1990s**, ECOS strengthened its organizational with new bylaws that allowed it to retain organizational members while adding individual members. These bylaws also put into place a Board with representation from key environmental groups while giving ECOS its own leadership.

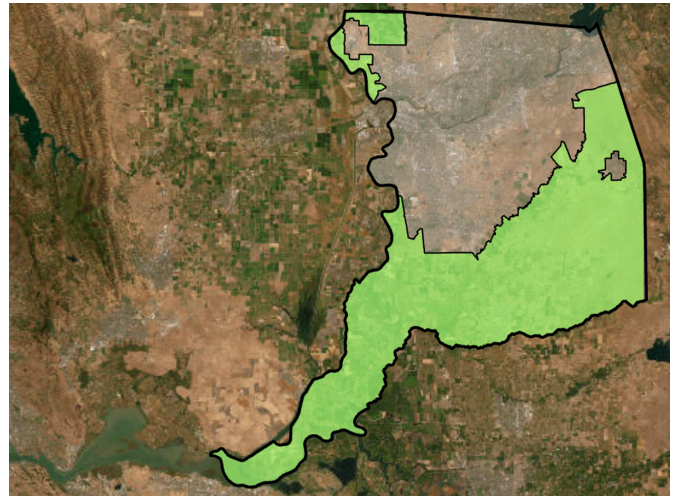
ECOS stated that managing our region's rapid growth was our biggest challenge. The pace had increased significantly, and with it, negative impacts on nearly every aspect of our environment. ECOS continued its efforts to reduce the impacts in these ways:

- Two ECOS board members wrote a research-supported policy paper linking sprawl and air pollution, stating that sprawl was by far the most important cause of our unhealthy air. This became the foundation for the national concept "Smart Growth". ECOS became one of the key groups in the country promoting this concept, and continued its advocacy for the adoption of an urban growth boundary.

- After twenty years of ECOS advocacy for smart growth, air quality protection, and transit, ECOS celebrated the inclusion of an Urban Services Boundary in the 1993 Sacramento County General Plan, along with policies to enforce and protect it.
- Advocated for a transportation system to reduce air pollution. Also, an ECOS member wrote an air quality policy recommendation requiring new major sources of emissions to achieve a 15 percent reduction in emissions. This became Sacramento County General Plan Policy AQ15.
- Participated in the “redesign” of the North Natomas Community Plan to achieve smart growth goals and strategies in this new community.
- Led the effort to influence, evaluate and litigate the Natomas Basin Habitat Conservation Plan to ensure that endangered species protection complied with the law.

ECOS addressed three additional issues:

- Led the community advisory group on the Aerojet Superfund Site (its advocacy to clean up toxics continues there), participated in the process for the Mather Air Force Base Superfund Site, and advocated for cleaning up toxics at McClellan Air Force Base, Curtis Park Railyards, and the downtown Railyards.
- Supported the American Lung Association in its vigorous campaign to ban rice straw burning, resulting in 1991 State legislation that led to its phase-out.
- Worked to establish the Water Forum, in partnership with the City and County of Sacramento in 1993. Since then, as a signatory to the Water Forum Agreement, ECOS has advocated for protection of the American River and groundwater banking through the Water Forum.



*Shown in green are the areas in Sacramento County that are protected by Urban Services Boundary*

**Since 2000:** ECOS expanded its community efforts by partnering with the Sacramento Housing Alliance and other community organizations to develop the Coalition on Regional Equity (CORE) to work on regional land use and health issues. ECOS has continued collaborations with member organizations and with SACOG, local governments, and State agencies. ECOS became a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in 2010.

Regional transportation continues to be a major issue. ECOS has used education, advocacy, and litigation to affect land use and transportation decisions, and to ensure that greenhouse gas impacts are accounted for in land use and transportation projects. ECOS and its members:

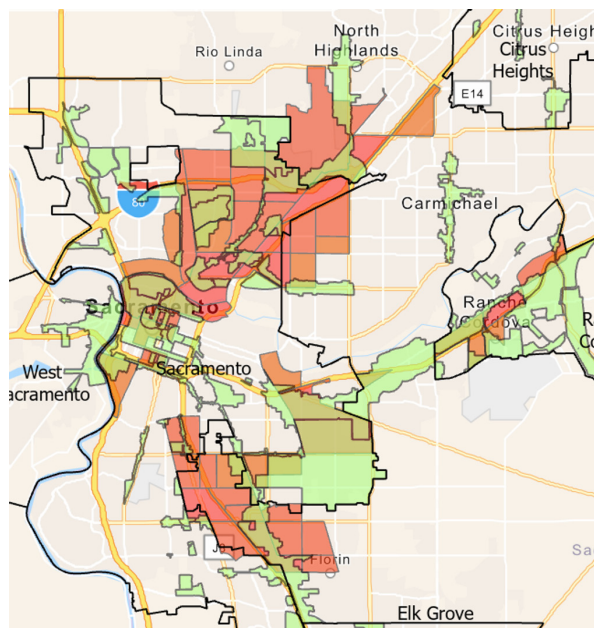
- Sued SACOG in 2000 due to its Regional Transportation Plan's lack of conformity with the federal Clean Air Act. This resulted in reforms to land use planning and SACOG's "Blueprint," a smart growth plan which has received national acclaim.

- In the early 2000s, developed a 50-Year Transportation Vision for the region to influence jurisdictions and SACOG to adopt less auto-oriented plans. ECOS worked with UC Davis' Environmental Department and SacRT on this Vision.
- Signed a Settlement Agreement with the Southeast Connector Joint Powers Authority in 2012 to achieve better mitigation for the growth-inducing impacts of the Connector and better habitat conservation planning.
- Sued Caltrans in 2007 and 2017 over its plans to add lanes to US 50. The settlements benefitted SacRT's Gold Line light rail between Sacramento and Folsom: Caltrans was to fund SacRT to double-track the line and increase the service frequency by 2024 from 30 to 15 minutes.
- Spawned Sacramento Investment Without Displacement (SIWD), which settled a lawsuit against University of California resulting in significant funds for affordable housing near UC Davis Medical Center's "Aggie Square" in a neighborhood threatened by gentrification.

Additional ECOS efforts include:

- Advocated for the South Sacramento Habitat Conservation Plan, which was adopted in 2018 after decades of advocacy, as a comprehensive plan for interconnected habitat preserve for terrestrial and aquatic species.
- Led a community planning and urban revitalization project on Hurley Way in Arden Arcade.
- Supported the Heartland Conservation Project and commented on the Delta Tunnel for its impacts to terrestrial species.
- Commented on City and County climate action plans, with Sierra Club Sacramento, 350 Sacramento, Citizens Climate Lobby Sacramento, and the Sacramento Climate Coalition.

- Are advancing habitat areas for the State's 30x30 land conservation program.
- Are working with the Water Forum, Regional Water Authority, local water purveyors, and Groundwater Sustainability Agencies for water planning, conservation, and groundwater-dependent ecosystem protection.



*Green Means Go "Green Zones" shown over our most environmentally impacted areas in red (see OEHA CalEnviroScreen maps)*

As we move further into the 21st Century, the region's environment is increasingly under threat from multiple directions including those initiated by climate change. More than ever, our efforts are needed. ECOS' role as a "council" that brings individuals and organizations together to address these challenges continues to be critical for positive change.

ECOS's 50 years of achievements resulted from significant efforts by individuals, ECOS committees, and member organizations. Look for further documentation of these efforts on our web, [www.ecosacramento.net](http://www.ecosacramento.net).