



ECOS

ENVIRONMENTAL  
♦ COUNCIL ♦  
OF SACRAMENTO

Post Office Box 1526 | Sacramento, CA 95812-1526

July 31, 2024

LAFCo Chair Desmond and Commissioners; Executive Officer Henriquez  
Sacramento City Mayor Steinberg and Council Members; Principal Planner Hertel  
Sacramento County Board Chair Patrick Kennedy and Supervisors; Planning Director Todd Smith

Subject: The position of ECOS on the proposed Airport South Industrial Project

Dear Sacramento-area Elected Officials, Executive and Planning Staff,

We would like to share our position on the proposed Airport South Industrial Project for the parcel south of I-5 in Natomas Basin.

Our position is based on forty years of work to support habitat for threatened species through the Natomas Basin Habitat Conservation Plan, as well as our recent review of the proposed Airport South Industrial Project's DEIR. On July 17, 2024, we submitted [our comment letter on the DEIR](#) to LAFCo and the City.

In our letter, we documented serious health and safety risks from the project:

- Young students at nearby schools will be exposed to harmful chemicals at unhealthy levels due to truck operations;
- Flights at Sacramento International Airport will be at higher risk of collision with waterfowl because of the proposed 96 acres of detention basin within 10,000 feet of the runway.

We also noted many impacts that were not analyzed or were disregarded – they are listed far below.

We'd like to focus here on the project's "significant impacts that cannot be mitigated." They are:

- 1) Farmland of 475 acres will be lost -- plus related loss of wildlife habitat and sequestered carbon;
- 2) Localized air pollution will get much worse for kids in the neighborhood while the regional air quality plan will be violated;
- 3) Aesthetics of the area will be diminished if farmland/habitat/open space is replaced by warehouses and pavement.

According to the DEIR, to approve the project despite such significant impacts, decision makers will have to adopt a "Statement of Overriding Consideration" that means they believe some things about the project are of greater benefit to society than the project's costs. The developers may see the following as benefits of the project:

- 1) Warehousing and truck delivery services - These may be necessary to our society, however, a) that need has not been demonstrated by the developer or any jurisdiction, and b) if there is a need, there are available vacant parcels and underutilized warehouses in existing developed areas of Sacramento County and Sacramento City that would welcome the business (as opposed to the competition) and that would have no impact on agricultural and habitat resources. If proximity to the airport is desired, the airport adjacent Metro AirPark is only half-way developed.

- 2) Increasing tax revenues to jurisdictions - This is always necessary, but that tax revenue can come from the project in a more suitable location.
- 3) Developer's profits - They are important but can be matched by a warehouse project in a different location.

We do not see these as perceived benefits from the project in this location, south of I-5 on land outside the USB, on land not permitted for development in the NBHCP, and, they are not, in our view, more important than public health, quality of life, and sustainability of habitat.

Further, these perceived benefits in this location do not constitute the "extraordinary circumstance" that would warrant four-fifths of the Supervisors to shift the County's "ultimate boundary of the urban area" – the Urban Services Boundary (USB) – and to create a precedent for two larger developments in the County to do the same. The USB boundary line was carefully thought out and reasoned, and we suggest a refresher presentation on those reasons is needed.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, these perceived benefits in this location are not sufficient to allow development of land that was affirmed by the U.S. District Court, in National Wildlife Federation v Gale Norton, to "remain in agricultural use" as shown in the following excerpt:

**“the remaining lands will remain in agricultural use.”**

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA  
 NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION, et al., Plaintiffs, v. GALE NORTON, Defendant.  
 CIV-S-04-0579 DFL JFM  
 MEMORANDUM OF OPINION AND ORDER  
 Dated September 7, 2005, signed by David F. Levi, U.S. District Judge

<https://natomasbasin.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/nbc080923nwfvnortonlevidecision.pdf>

From Section 3.C.: The Service, and the court, are entitled to assume at this point that future development will not be permitted if sufficient mitigation land is unavailable and the development will result in jeopardy.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The court notes, however, that the Service and those seeking an ITP in the future will face an uphill battle if they attempt to argue that additional development in the Basin beyond 17,500 acres will not result in jeopardy. The NBHCP, BiOp, EIR/EIS, and Findings and Recommendations are all predicated on the assumption that development in the Basin will be limited to 17,500 acres and that the remaining lands will remain in agricultural use. (AR20-24, 862, 866-67, 1171-72, 1617-18.)

Based on our review, impacts that were not analyzed or were disregarded include:

1. Human health impacts of toxic air contaminant emissions that will affect Paso Verde school and Westlake residences and ultrafine particulate emissions resulting from the project and its increase in traffic;
2. Negative impacts to the Natomas Basin Habitat Conservation Plan, wildlife and preserves for wildlife;

<sup>1</sup> Sacramento County General Plan, Land Use Element, page 20.  
<https://planning.saccounty.gov/Documents/B12.%20Land%20Use%20Element%20Amended%2012-13-22.pdf>

3. The impact of making changes to the County's Urban Services Boundary;
4. Alternatives analysis did not consider alternative locations for large warehouse space such as Sutter County, Metro Airpark and McClellan Park.
5. The FAA requirements for detention basins within 10,000 feet of the airport runway;
6. Full impacts of non-compliance with air quality, transportation, and other regional plans;
7. Health impacts from construction noise and operations;
8. How the project would comply with Clean Water Act requirements was not disclosed;
9. Negative traffic impacts on I-5 are obvious but not fully disclosed;
10. Other projects (particularly WattEV) were not included in the Cumulative Impacts assessment for traffic, noise, air quality, pollution, and others

This project could harm the viability of Sacramento's airport as the project's huge detention basins will attract migrating birds into the airport flight path increasing the potential for bird strikes.

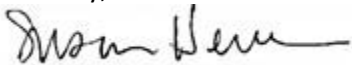
The air quality impacts of this and other nearby projects could cause the loss of federal funding for transportation as they contribute to the obstruction of our regional air quality plan.

Currently existing warehouse facilities in economically disadvantaged areas of the City and County will lose business to this newer facility. There are numerous industrially zoned locations available, with existing infrastructure, where the jobs would be welcome.

This project would require annexation of farmland into the City and construction of all infrastructure. It will cause great harm to the integrity of the Natomas Basin Habitat Conservation Plan, existing preserves, wildlife, and to the Natomas community and school children. It should not be approved.

Thank you for considering our position. We are available to respond to any questions you may have and would be happy to make a short presentation to you at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Susan Herre AIA AICP  
President of the Board of Directors  
Environmental Council of Sacramento

cc: Dylan Wood of CA Fish & Wildlife  
Adam Stewart of US Fish & Wildlife  
John Roberts of Natomas Basin Conservancy  
James Corless, SACOG CEO and Executive Director  
Clint Holtzen, SACOG Planning Manager  
Sacramento City Planner Scott Johnson