

# Homegrown Habitat Regional Governance Program Statement

October 31, 2019

The Sacramento Chapter of the California Native Plant Society (CNPS), in coordination with State CNPS, ECOS and Habitat 2020, has embarked upon an ambitious regional campaign, called Homegrown Habitat, to promote the preferential use of California Native Plants in home, commercial, institutional, and civic landscaping. CNPS has prepared a list of appropriate annual and perennial plants, shrubs and trees (HH Plant List) for use in the Sacramento region's built environment. CNPS is currently building the capacity to ensure that these landscaping options are widely available locally. City wide utilization of these plants will directly contribute to several of the Sacramento region's major long-term goals. Utilization of the local native plants found on the HH Plant List in public spaces, residential areas, and institutional, commercial, and industrial landscapes will lower water consumption, provide carbon sequestration benefits (even during extended periods of drought when many non-native plants, shrubs and trees perish), and contribute to regional biodiversity by providing homes and food for pollinators and beneficial insects, local and migratory birds, and animal populations. We urge all levels of regional governance and the citizens they serve to embrace the Homegrown Habitat program and fully utilize the local native plants found on the HH Plant List in the region's landscapes. The following steps will help jumpstart the Homegrown Habitat program throughout our region.

1. Set an example for the public regarding the environmental benefits and importance to biodiversity of planting local, native plants by publicly modifying the city and county landscaping protocols and plant specifications to incorporate the HH Plant List, and initiate efforts to replace city and county landscaping with these plants.
2. Initiate an assessment of each local government's landscaping to prioritize the incorporation of HH Plant List plantings in parks, public spaces, medians, and other spaces to assist in linking up or forming networks of green corridors and habitat waystations that facilitate the movement of native plants, insects, birds, and animals to and from the delta across the valley through the Sacramento region's built environment. Habitat 2020's Heartland mapping system can assist in these assessments.
3. Replace 50% or more of the Sacramento region's public space lawn landscapes with selected palates of local native plants selected from the HH Plant List.
4. Work with water agencies to target residential and commercial water conservation programs to replace 50% or more of lawn landscapes of all customer classes they serve, with local native plants from the HH Plant List.
5. Place conditions on the landscaping used in future developments and infill projects within each jurisdiction to require the use of local native plants from the HH Plant List and significantly restrict the use of turf and artificial lawns.
6. Promote public awareness of the importance of local native plants to the region's future through public information and education initiatives, and advance practices and actions they can take to promote the growth and health of native plants including how to plant them, the appropriate applications of water, and the inappropriate applications of pesticides and fertilizers.

7. Educate the public on the importance of local biodiversity and how local native plants provide a basic building block for native insects and pollinators, bird populations, and personal wellbeing. Promote practices and actions, including management of nighttime lighting, that contribute to the region's continued biodiversity.

Residential landscaping accounts for more than 50% of the average household's daily water usage (Regional Water Authority Waterwise data). Additionally, during the summer when landscaping water demands are at their highest, 30% of this water is lost to evaporation from turf lawns (Regional Water Authority Waterwise data). This water loss also occurs in city and county controlled landscaping that includes turf, and holds true for institutional, commercial and industrial turf landscaping as well. Unfortunately, in long periods of drought such as the Sacramento region experienced in 2012-15, regional residents and businesses as well as city and county government operations can lose significant landscaping investments because plant colonies and turf typically in use cannot withstand the valley's high temperatures coupled with reduced water availability. Conditions like the recent drought are expected to become more severe and more frequent as the Sacramento region experiences climate change.

Individual homeowners and business, and the region's governments will be hit with a double impact as the region's climate changes. The region's existing landscape plant, shrub, and tree inventory will lose much of its functionality (shade and privacy), and its beauty and health benefits; and residents, business, and local governments will face the inherent costs of time and money to replace dead or damaged landscaping during milder weather cycles. The region also loses landscape carbon sequestration which further exacerbates climate change; and thriving habitat with the associated loss of local insects, including pollinators, local and migratory birds, and animal populations that depend on plants. Unfortunately, climate change is promising more frequent and severe regional droughts, and this means the potential exists for a continuing cycle of boom and bust for non-local native plant landscaping within the region's built environment.

This cycle is broken when the region's local governments and their residents' landscape with local native plants found on the HH Plant List instead of turf lawns and non-local, higher water use plants that also don't support local insect populations. A traditionally landscaped home in the region's metropolitan area can save up to 60% or more of its watering costs and a significant amount of landscape maintenance cost by converting to a landscape of plants, shrubs, and trees from the HH Plant List (Sacramento Valley Chapter, California Native Plant Society). These local native plants typically require low or very low amounts of water to thrive and have adapted to grow and thrive in the Sacramento region's native soils and climate for thousands of years. Gardening and maintenance costs are significantly lower with these plants because they do not require fertilizer, pesticides or special soil amendments. Plant palletes can be selected for any gardening location's shade or sun condition and can provide blooms and color throughout the year. Local insects, birds and animals thrive on these plants, so the use of these plants contributes to the region's carbon sequestration and biodiversity. The ability of local native plants to withstand climate change will contribute to homeowner shade, prosperity, and overall improved quality of life.

Carbon sequestration is achieved and maintained throughout the region's built environment through the broad use of the local native plants on the HH Plant List. Many of the trees and shrubs found on the list are long lived and woody which translates into sustained carbon sequestration. These plants are equipped to survive prolonged periods of low, very low or even no supplemental irrigation and, therefore, continue to sequester carbon when other non-drought tolerant plantings often perish thus reducing the region's ability to sequester carbon.

The HH Plant List provides palletes of local native plants that achieve the above benefits. Experts in biology, entomology, conservation, education, and landscape design joined with the California Native Plant Society, Sacramento Valley Chapter, to develop the list for the Sacramento region. The listed plants support hundreds of butterflies, moths, native bees, and other pollinators. They are homes for other beneficial insects, which in turn support local and migratory birds and animal populations. Year-round habitat for pollinators supports residential agricultural activity. These plants already survive without human attention along the American river parkway and the region's creeks, and are celebrated for their beauty and resilience. They are equally at home in front and back yards, common HOA and developer spaces, commercial landscapes, public and institutional spaces, and medians and agricultural hedgerows.