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The Ecological Cities Project
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The Ecological Cities Project

*Promoting Dialogue
Through Research,
Teaching, and Outreach*

www.ecologicalcities.org

A Program Based at the
University of Massachusetts Amherst

What is the Ecological Cities Project?

The Ecological Cities Project is a quasi-independent program of research, teaching, and outreach based at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. The Project documents and compares significant new strategies to make urban places (neighborhoods, communities, regions) greener, healthier, more equitable, and more fun. It facilitates sharing of knowledge and experience among disciplines, sectors of effort, and urban regions through conferences, meetings, lectures, publications, and its website. Regional ecological cities conferences have been held in Boston, New York City, Columbia, SC, Milwaukee, and Istanbul, Turkey (January 2005).

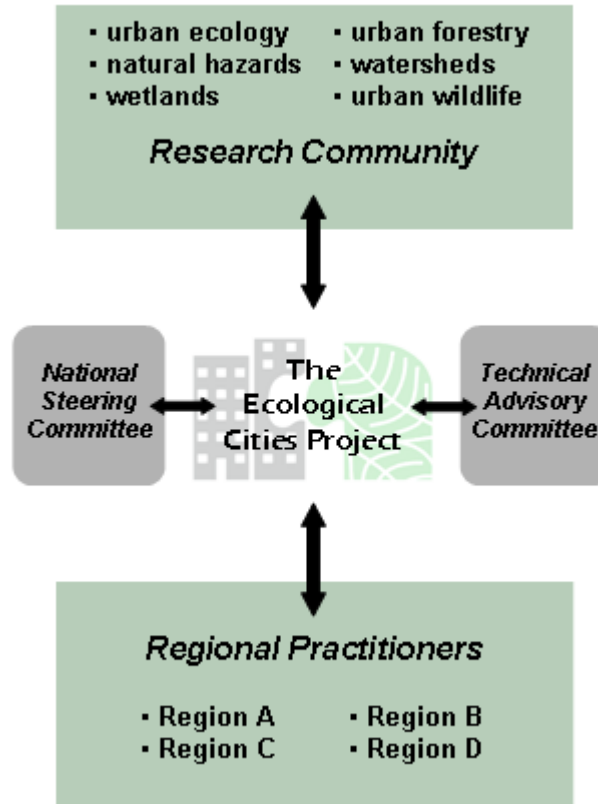
In 2002, the Project held a conference in New York: *The Humane Metropolis: People and Nature in the 21st Century City* supported by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Laurance S. Rockefeller, and the Wyomissing Foundation. A short film available on DVD and a book to be published by the University of Massachusetts Press, each entitled *The Humane Metropolis*, are based on that conference.

The Project is conducting research on comparative approaches to urban watershed restoration supported by the National Science Foundation (see opposite panel). Some twenty graduate students and off-campus researchers have studied watershed programs in a dozen urban areas under our auspices. A follow-on proposal for further research on urban stream restoration is pending.



RUTHERFORD H. PLATT, founder and director of the Ecological Cities Project, is a professor of geography and planning law at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. He graduated from Yale and holds a J.D. and Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. His most recent books are *Land Use and Society: Geography, Law, and Public Policy* (Revised Edition, Island Press, 2004) and *Disasters and Democracy: The Politics of Extreme Natural Events* (Island Press, 1999). He was lead editor of *The Ecological City: Preserving and Restoring Urban Biodiversity* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1994). He has served on many national panels and in 2002 was appointed a Lifetime National Associate of The National Academies. A native of New York City, his professional career began as staff attorney with the Chicago Openlands Project. Public speaking and research now take him to cities and universities across the United States and abroad. He resides in Northampton, Massachusetts.

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Strategies

- Facilitate regional Ecological Cities symposia
- Conduct research on urban ecological functions and management
- Encourage cross-fertilization among cities and metropolitan regions
- Publish working papers, articles and proceedings volumes
- Publicize the project through participation in conferences, media, op-ed columns, and our website (www.ecologicalcities.org)
- Train undergraduate and graduate students in relevant disciplines
- Organize on-campus roundtables and visiting lectures

Urban Stream Corridor Research

Between 1960 and 2000, metropolitan America doubled in population from 112 million to 226 million people (comprising 80% of total U.S. population in 2000). The geographic extent of areas designated as "metropolitan" also doubled from 9 percent to about 18 percent of the lower 48 states. This rapid urban sprawl has widely degraded local streams, wetlands, ponds, aquifers, and coastal estuaries. In the process, nature's *ecological services* (in Gretchen Daily's term) have been impaired. These services, including flood mitigation, moderation of microclimate, filtering of pollutants, and biotic habitat have been replaced, if at all, through costly technological substitutes such as flood control projects, water and sewage treatment plants, and air conditioning.

Urban stream advocates have long encouraged programs to rehabilitate local streams, wetlands, and watersheds, through measures like stream daylighting, dam removal, wetland restoration, and streambank bioengineering. Many cities including Washington, DC, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh and Houston view riverfront restoration as a key element of downtown revitalization, raising issues of gentrification and affordable housing where urban waterways are bordered by low income communities.

Since 2002, the project has conducted a study funded by the National Science Foundation (Grant No. CMS-0201409) to document and compare diverse regional approaches to urban watershed management. This research is premised on the assumption that aquatic resources are critical to the health, habitability, and aesthetic quality of urban places. Case studies in preparation focus on the Charles River (Boston), the Milwaukee River, the Anacostia (DC), Buffalo Bayou (Houston), Johnson Creek (Portland, OR), and elsewhere. A proposed new study will examine selected experience in restoring segments of urban streams.

Restoration, however defined, is potentially a valuable tool to enhance such goals as flood hazard reduction, water quality protection, groundwater recharge, public recreation, and environmental education. We view efforts to enhance and restore degraded aquatic resources within urban areas as a key pathway towards more ecological cities.

For more information, please contact us at:

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