



environmental  
DEFENSE CENTER



# 2024-2028 STRATEGIC PLAN

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From its very beginning, Environmental Defense Center (EDC) has linked arms with local communities, tribes, and other nonprofits to protect the environment and promote environmental justice on the Central Coast of California. For almost 50 years, we have shown up in service to our many partners and used our legal, policy, and scientific expertise to win lasting protections for clean air, clean water, wild spaces, and a healthy environment for all for generations to come.

Our work is more critical than ever before. Climate change, biodiversity loss, and inequity are increasingly urgent; they are compounding challenges across the globe and here at home. These are real and present dangers we face today. We have witnessed how the impacts of climate change (like extreme heat, flooding, and poor air quality from wildfire smoke) are felt most severely by frontline workers, low income communities, and communities of color. We recognize the need to expand our partnerships with grassroots environmental justice groups and diversify our organization to better reflect all the people of our region and tackle the issues that matter most.

In 2022, we began an in-depth process with the board and staff to re-imagine and clarify our purpose and plan for the future through an equity lens. This strategic plan is the result of that effort. The plan takes a comprehensive look at all aspects of the organization—programs, team, communications, and finance and development—and sets ambitious but achievable goals that will carry EDC through to its 50th anniversary in 2028. It will serve as a blueprint to focus and guide our efforts. Our intention is to have a living document that can be adapted as we experiment and learn. This plan directs us toward our shared vision: ***a world where people and nature thrive.***

Over the next five years, we will diversify our network of partners, grow our environmental justice work, and extend our impact to rise to the challenges of our time. As we do so, we are committed to these strategic priorities:

- Confront the climate crisis through our efforts to end fossil fuel extraction and speed a just transition to clean energy.
- Stand up for justice for vulnerable communities across the Central Coast by growing our environmental justice work in partnership with a more diverse coalition of community groups.
- Focus our ongoing efforts to advance environmental protection on the Central Coast by prioritizing high impact work that addresses environmental injustices and enhances climate resilience for both nature and people.

EDC will build on a long track record of success, which includes fighting against the fossil fuel industry, destructive development, and other threats to wildlife, open space, and human health. EDC is the only nonprofit environmental law firm between Los Angeles and San Francisco, and we continue to make protecting our beloved Central Coast - Santa Barbara, Ventura, and San Luis Obispo counties - our primary focus. Our goals are organized into four impact arenas: Climate and Energy, Ocean Land and Water, and Environmental Justice. The plan is underpinned by a set of internal capacity building priorities, which will help us maximize the success of our programs and expand our impact, as reflected on the following page.

# OUR MISSION

Defending nature and advancing environmental justice on California's Central Coast through advocacy and legal action

# OUR VISION

A world where people and nature thrive

## PROGRAM GOALS

### CLIMATE & ENERGY

- Prevent new or expanded oil and gas development and work to eliminate existing oil and gas infrastructure
- Advocate for clean energy policies and projects (while still protecting environmental and cultural resources)
- Advocate for reduced reliance on fossil fuels (e.g. electrification, efficiency, storage)

### OCEAN

- Expand and secure permanent protections for marine species and ecosystems
- Protect the marine environment from water pollution
- Ensure access and recreation for all, compatible with conservation

### LAND & WATER

- Continue ongoing work to expand and secure permanent protection for land, wildlife, rivers, creeks, and watershed
- Prioritize cases that address the most vulnerable species and ecosystems and have the highest environmental benefits
- Ensure access and recreation for all, compatible with conservation

### ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

- Expand connections with environmental justice and BIPOC groups and better understand communities of color, low income, and other affected communities' needs, issues, and perspectives
- Broaden our environmental justice program work
- Consider environmental justice when evaluating new cases and activities across all program areas

## ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY PRIORITIES

### TEAM

Increase our capacity and expertise by recruiting, developing, and retaining diverse staff, interns, legal fellows, volunteers, and board members and develop organizational culture and systems with a focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

### COMMUNICATIONS

Enhance communications, storytelling, and events to celebrate and leverage the 50th anniversary and connect with broader, more diverse audiences.

### FINANCE & DEVELOPMENT

Grow and diversify EDC's funding streams, including growing the endowment, to support organizational and program priorities.

In 2022, in recognition of the increasingly urgent and intersecting challenges we face from climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental injustice, EDC undertook an in-depth process to re-imagine and clarify our purpose and plan for the future. The result is this new strategic plan which sets ambitious but achievable five-year goals across programs, team, communications, and finance and development. It will serve as a blueprint to focus and guide our efforts to deliver on our mission:

*Defending nature and advancing  
environmental justice  
on California's Central Coast  
through advocacy and legal action*

As we pursue our goals, and in all that we do, we are guided by these shared values:

**EXPERTISE**

Legal, policy, and scientific expertise are our hallmark. We dedicate our expertise to defending the land, water, wildlife, and communities of California's Central Coast from environmental threats.

**PARTNERSHIP**

Our effectiveness relies on a strong and broad coalition of partners. We are allies in the fights for environmental protection and justice led by local community based organizations.

**JUSTICE & EQUITY**

We acknowledge that generations of discriminatory policies and the growing climate crisis disproportionately impact the lives, health, and wellbeing of disenfranchised communities. EDC is committed to repairing inequities within the environmental movement and fighting environmental injustices across our region.

**INCLUSION**

We believe people from all backgrounds, especially those who are most impacted by environmental threats and a changing climate, belong in the environmental movement. We only have one planet, and it will take all of us working together to protect it.

**INTEGRITY**

Integrity is the foundation of our actions and decisions. We are committed to upholding the highest ethical standards in our pursuit of environmental protection and justice for the Central Coast.

**TENACITY**

EDC is here for the long haul. We have been fighting for environmental protection on the Central Coast for almost 50 years. We face some of the most powerful companies and agencies in the world and we stand with our community and stay with cases for years or even decades to ensure victory.