

# Sonoma Resource Conservation District

ANNUAL REPORT  
2017-2018



## Message from the Executive Director and Board Chairman

Dear Friends of the RCD,

Although this past year has been eventful and trying, it has truly renewed our gratitude for this beautiful place and strong community where we live and work. As we look back at the past year and then turn our eyes toward the future, a few words come to mind: Relationships. Resiliency. Regeneration.

Now more than ever, one of the RCD's foundational beliefs is that conservation is not just about natural resources, it is also about people. Relationships are key in everything we do, and the pages of this report contain many examples of work that would not be possible without partners: numerous local agencies and nonprofits, public and private funders, talented local contractors, and the landowners that steward our county's precious landscapes. The level of collaboration in this community over the past year has been astounding, and we look forward to continuing to strengthen these relationships that we treasure and rely upon.

At the core of our work is creating resiliency; the ability of the land to sustain damage through healthy and abundant ecosystems. In times of drought, flood, and fire, the RCD is uniquely positioned to meet a range of needs. At one end of the spectrum, we are often called upon to respond to essential needs, such as addressing damage to the land after fires to prevent soil loss. At the other end of the spectrum, we get to support the innovative dreams of landowners working on groundwater recharge and carbon sequestration. Across the spectrum of needs, we are honored to be partners in helping landowners to create more resilient landscapes.

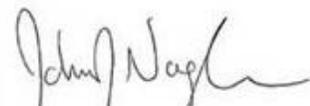
From fundamental conservation needs to innovation, there is good work to be done to keep Sonoma County's natural and working landscapes thriving. In addressing ever-growing demands, we must focus on regenerative solutions, those in which our investments of time and funding yield long-term outcomes where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. We must invest from the ground up: from building up the soil that is foundational to agriculture and ecosystems, to building networks for sharing information among the people who manage the land. This has been a banner year for these types of investments, and we're just getting started!

We look at the past year with gratitude, and look forward to the future with hope. We are so honored to be part of Sonoma County's strong community, and look forward to working with you all in the coming year.

In Partnership,



Valerie Minton Quinto  
Executive Director



John Nagle  
Board Chair

## Mission-Based Impact



Graduated the **20th class** of **FARMS LEADERSHIP STUDENTS**. The FARMS program was launched in Sonoma County in 1998



Completed **21 EMERGENCY EROSION CONTROL PROJECTS** (Riparian planting, burned culvert replacement, native seeding, straw mulching, wattle installation)



Collected **SOIL SAMPLES FOR CARBON FARM TRIALS: 1,397** utilizing **7** staff in the season



Submitted **29 PROJECTS FOR INCLUSION IN STORM WATER RESOURCE PLANS**



**PARTICIPATED IN COMMUNITY EVENTS** totaling over **13,000 people**



Completed **5 RE-OAKING PROJECTS** after the fires with local partners



Saved **130,000 GALLONS OF WATER** through six rainwater catchment projects



Supported **14 DAIRY PRODUCERS** with mapping



Provided **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE** to **60 landowners**



Designed **2,372 feet OF HEDGEROWS** for beneficial habitat and pollinators



Reached **3,251 people** through **ONLINE COMMUNICATIONS**



Secured **\$2,548,022** in **GRANT FUNDING** for work our District



Completed **2 CARBON FARM PLANS** and one in progress



Brought on **4 new RCD TEAM MEMBERS**

The Sonoma RCD's mission is to empower and partner with landowners and the community to address Sonoma County's most pressing natural resource concerns.

## Innovation from the Ground Up: Carbon Sequestration Field Trials

*Farmers know that soil often holds the key to success on their ranches and vineyards and that it can also often be the root of farming challenges. The soil also holds great promise when it comes to combating the most over-arching conservation issue of our time: climate change.*

### *Renewed Attention to Soil Health and Carbon-Beneficial Farming*

North Coast producers and the RCDs have been closely collaborating in the past year to coordinate regional soil health efforts. Sonoma RCD has so far completed 3 Carbon Farm Plans on confined livestock (fiber), rangeland and dairy properties and recently began work on the first 2 Carbon Farm Plans for vineyards, to assist landowners in identifying and adopting practices that help to sequester carbon and improve soil health. Carbon Farming involves a suite of agricultural practices that capture and store carbon in vegetation and soils, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The key practices include applying compost, planting cover crops, reducing or eliminating tillage, and planting woody plants. Significant long-term carbon storage can be achieved through proper implementation of these practices. As organic matter builds in the soil through utilizing these practices, soil health and structure improves, which increases water holding capacity and infiltration. Carbon farming simultaneously benefits our climate while enhancing soil fertility and crop and pasture production.

### *The Beginning of Field Demonstrations*

Last year also marked the beginning of two demonstration field trials, funded by the California Department of Food and Agriculture's Healthy Soils Program, to explore changes in soil health and carbon levels from compost application on a working rangeland and vineyard property. The field trial at Jackson Family Wines' Saralee's Vineyard is looking at compost application and three types of traditional tillage methods in Sonoma County vineyards (no till, alternate row tillage, and full till) and how those to management practices influence soil carbon levels, yields, and soil health parameters like water holding capacity. A second

field trial at Sonoma Mountain Institute is exploring changes in plant diversity, soil health, and forage productivity from compost application on their rangelands. A third trial is ongoing at Indian Springs Ranch in Kenwood, where soil moisture is being tracked for no till, alternate row tillage and full till plots. Soil analysis was conducted in spring 2017 and will be done again in 2019, to compare changes in soil health parameters for each type of tillage management. These field demonstrations complement the work of neighboring RCDs who are carrying out similar projects.

### *Becoming Soil Sampling Experts*

Sonoma RCD collected a total of 1,397 soil samples this spring to assist local landowners with assessing soil health in their vineyards and rangelands and to support the field trials discussed above. Laboratory results will be evaluated later this year with technical experts from UC Davis and Santa Rosa Junior College in order to begin developing a regional dataset specific to our local soils that can inform a producer about the condition of soil in their vineyard or rangeland property and assist them with making future soil management decisions.

### *Establishing a Regional Soil Health Hub*

Over one year ago, the North Coast RCDs launched a regional hub to disseminate information about soil health and promote soil conversation among ranchers and winegrowers. The "Soil Hub" as it's deemed, sets out to capture the goings on in soil health and to provide a platform for growers, researchers and other natural resource partners to engage in conversation. Together we've held numerous workshops and tailgates to increase collaboration and share on the ground experiences. To learn more, visit [www.soilhub.org](http://www.soilhub.org).

## Water for Salmon and School Yard Habitat

In the Mill Creek watershed, the West Side School Rainwater Catchment Demonstration Project was implemented in June 2018 to increase the visibility of water storage and promote similar projects for water resiliency. Harvesting rainwater off of rooftops is an efficient and practical way to reduce water use from wells located alongside critical salmonid habitat. Engaging neighborhood groups along with individual residents allows for information sharing and a greater positive impact. We are thrilled to have West Side School as an active partner in this demonstration project.

The work was funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Department of Water Resources through competitive grant funding and was developed by the RCD through the Russian River Coho Partnership (Partnership). The Partnership was formed in 2009, in response to the decline of Coho salmon in the Russian River watershed, to develop a systematic approach to improve streamflow and water supply reliability in five Russian River tributaries including the Mill Creek Watershed. The Sonoma County RCDs have been part of this effort since its inception. The Partnership couples flow monitoring with fish monitoring to develop a variety of projects that improve stream flow to increase salmonid survival and increase water security and availability for residents who depend on the stream and streamside wells for their water supply.

The Westside School project is adjacent to Felta Creek, a major tributary to Mill Creek that supports critical habitat for Coho salmon. Capturing rainwater off of the school's roof and storing it in six above ground tanks equaling 30,000 gallons of water stored, will help to irrigate approximately 9,000 sq. ft. of playing field, a vegetable garden and fruit trees on the campus. The rainwater catchment project, paired with remediating the 9,000 sq. ft. playing field with drought tolerant grasses to increase water savings, will reduce the school's reliance on a streamside well.

Over the last several years, the RCD has worked with a number of private landowners along Mill Creek to install rainwater tanks with a similar objective to reduce streamside well usage and improve water security. Capitalizing on West Side School as a public space to not only demonstrate water conservation practices, but to educate on issues concerning the watershed's health and how everyone can play a role in its vitality will be key in years to come.



*"West Side School has a long tradition of environmental education and land stewardship. The Project, just completed in June, will be a significant addition to the science curriculum and provide teachers with an amazing opportunity to expand students' direct experience with sustainable practices in water conservation."*

*—Rhonda Bellmer, Principal,  
West Side School*

# Fire Recovery & Community Resilience

The tragic wildfires of October 2017 brought out the best in our community. The RCD was honored to serve many landowners who suffered loss and trauma during the fires. For so many who love the land where they live, recovering natural resources has been part of healing and moving forward. Here are some snapshots of the RCD's post-fire watershed recovery and resiliency efforts.

## Working Together

October 2017 was an all-hands-on-deck moment for our community. The RCD was one of many partners that came together to coordinate watershed recovery efforts. A key partner in our fire recovery efforts was the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). RCD and NRCS staff came together to receive training from a retired NRCS staffer with years of experience in post-fire watershed response and recovery. Once trained, our two organizations coordinated our response to technical assistance calls in order to maximize our reach on the ground. Another key partner was the Ag + Open Space District, who convened a Watershed Collaborative to strategize for watershed recovery and resiliency. RCD staff led the Working Lands workgroup of the Collaborative, and look forward to working with the numerous partners involved to implement the identified recommendations in the coming years.

**124** technical assistance site visits performed, covering approx. **10%** of the land impacted by fire in Sonoma County

## Sharing Knowledge

One of the RCD's long-time roles is a clearinghouse for information. In response to the fires, we continued and expanded our emphasis on information sharing. We developed and disseminated a Natural Resources Recovery Guide with information on services offered by federal, state, and local agencies, and uploaded many other informational resources to our website. We attended numerous community events to table and speak, to provide general information on post-fire watershed recovery, and to make the community aware of technical assistance services. And we hosted workshops and neighborhood walks where those impacted by the fires could share their stories, ask their questions, and learn from professionals and one another about what to expect as their land heals from fires.

**987** community members reached during RCD workshops and community events.

## Recovering the Land

As the fires still burned, RCD staff began researching which landowner partners had property that may have suffered impacts. We also began researching how existing grant funds could be re-purposed in order to rapidly respond to needs on the ground. With the cooperation of numerous funders and the fast action of local partners, we were able to fund/implement numerous projects including: erosion control, riparian re-planting, fence replacement, and culvert replacement. We have identified many other priority projects on the landscape, and have additional funding pending from the State Water Board to implement some of these projects.

**21** fire recovery projects implemented so far, with more than **40** in the hopper at the end of our fiscal year.



## Moving Forward

Helping the land recover from the fires of 2017 will take time. We continue to work with partner organizations and landowners to plan for the next steps in watershed recovery. Concurrently, we must also take a proactive approach to developing the resiliency of our landscapes for the future. Over the past year, the RCD has been building capacity to help landowners plan for and implement forest management that will benefit forest health, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, and improve resiliency to future fires. We have worked in partnership with the Mendocino RCD to begin offering LandSmart Forest Management Plans, and in June we hired our own Registered Professional Forester to add to our capacity in this arena. We also continue to work with the Sonoma County Forest Conservation Working Group and other local partners to coordinate outreach and education associated with forest management. Together, we can build a more resilient Sonoma County!

**\$1,209,758** was secured after the October fires to assist landowners with natural resource recovery efforts on their properties.



*"The last 6 months since the 10/8/17 wine country fires has been quite an experience dealing with insurance companies, the property clean up and preparation for the rainy season. It has been depressing with some 10,000 burned trees and actually not a single tree surviving on my 10 acre property, however one bright spot has been the support I have received from Sonoma RCD, both in terms of recommendations as well as actual economical and pure help."*

— Per Rosdahl, Rural Forest Landowner

*"RCD helped restore native vegetation along my creek channel after the October wildfires, and I could not be more pleased with the care they gave the project, and the property. All of my concerns were mitigated with ease, even considering the sometimes difficult conditions that arise on a longstanding farm property."*

— Alex Benward, Beltane Ranch

## Two Decades of Educating the Next Generation of Conservationists

"FARMS Leadership taught me the impact we have on our environment and why sustainable farming is important," stated Fernando Isol of North Bay Met Academy, Class of 2018 upon his final day in FARMS Leadership. The RCD's longest standing youth education program, FARMS Leadership, celebrated its 20th graduating class at the beautiful Scott Ranch in Petaluma on May 11, 2018. The RCD is proud to host this program for high school youth throughout Sonoma County. A state-wide program facilitated by the Center for Land-Based Learning (CLBL), our graduates join approximately 300 other students in California that complete the program annually.

The impact on the students is long lasting, some alumni seeking jobs within agriculture and conservation while others gain knowledge of our local food systems, importance of our working landscape as a tool for natural resource conservation, and feel more confident to engage in community service. Working with CLBL and groups like My Job Depends on Ag™, we are able to secure scholarships for our qualified seniors entering into environmental or agricultural higher education institutions. This year, Carpe Diem High School Senior, Makena Calegari Toleu received a \$500 scholarship from My Job Depends on Ag™ to attend the Santa Rosa Junior College to study Agribusiness this fall.

"I love that we are exposing kids to a different world that's literally in their back yard," said Shiloh Winders, a teacher at Sonoma Mountain and Carpe Diem High Schools in Petaluma. "I like that it shows the huge variety of jobs in agriculture that are truly viable options for these students. It is a very welcoming environment where students are more willing to come out of their shells and participate, ask questions, and take risks that they wouldn't in the classroom."

In honor of our anniversary, this fall we will launch a second year FARMS Advanced program that complements and builds upon our existing programming. A cohort of qualified alumni from year one will take a deeper dive into studying local agricultural issues with a focus on career and college access planning. We will build upon leadership skills learned in year one and will work one-on-one with the FARMS coordinator to research, develop and implement a pre-identified project in partnership with a host farm or ranch and industry partners.



Watersheds are a living network of natural and working lands supporting natural resource function, wildlife habitat, communities, and businesses. Working on a watershed scale has been woven into the fabric of the RCD for over 70 years. The RCD coordinates amongst diverse non-profit and agency partners, agriculturalists, and residents to assess and identify solutions to the most pressing needs of natural resources and people. Watershed scale efforts in South County that have been building over the last several years came to fruition for our team and partners in 2018.

It has been six years since the launch of LandSmart® programming and conservation planning services. We launched this programming with our regional RCD partners to adopt a consistent approach to land management across county boundaries and within watersheds. During this time, we made it a top priority to provide the most relevant programming to our community through the services offered under LandSmart, including at times aligning our services to help landowners prepare for future regulation. In February 2018, LandSmart was approved by the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Board as a Third-Party Program to assist vineyard owners in the Sonoma Creek watershed in complying with new Waste Discharge Requirements. This is an extraordinary milestone for LandSmart in Sonoma County and a critical component to watershed management on a property by property scale.

In 2015, the RCD and the San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI) were awarded a grant from the United States Environmental Protection Agency to develop a historical watershed study of the Petaluma River. The study, completed in early 2018, examines the historical hydrology and ecology of the Petaluma River Watershed prior to major Euro-American modification, and analyzes landscape changes over the past two centuries. Synthesizing information from hundreds of archival documents, the research reconstructs the historical form and function of water bodies throughout the watershed, providing insights into habitat extent and distribution, streamflow and sediment dynamics, vegetation composition, wildlife support, and landscape change. While returning the watershed to its historical state may not be a feasible goal, findings from this research can be used to identify and prioritize multi-benefit opportunities to enhance wildlife habitat and flood protection, increase groundwater recharge, and improve sediment management.

Building upon the recently-completed study, the RCD is now undertaking a restoration feasibility analysis to assess which areas of the watershed have the characteristics needed for viable, self-sustaining habitat restoration projects. This work will include interviews with landowners to learn more about barriers to restoration and incentives that could be used to promote win-win projects. At the same time, the RCD is part of a multi-stakeholder collaboration taking shape within the watershed to better coordinate watershed planning and implementation of priority watershed stewardship activities.

These are just a few examples of the RCD's watershed scale efforts. Similar work is occurring throughout our District, and we look forward to working with many of you on these efforts in the coming year.

## Watershed Scale Integration in the South County



*"The California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance values the partnership we have enjoyed with the Sonoma RCD over the years, including sharing networks and expertise to enhance winegrower education and having their "boots on the ground" to help winegrowers implement practices that protect soil health and conserve natural resources. By utilizing the LandSmart program and partnering with the collaborative Sonoma RCD team on the recent Region 2 Waste Discharge Requirement for Vineyards, we were able to offer the additional resources needed to serve more winegrowers impacted by the permit."*

*—Allison Jordan, Executive Director,  
California Sustainable Winegrowing  
Alliance*

# Financial Highlights 2017-2018

## ASSETS, LIABILITIES & NET POSITION

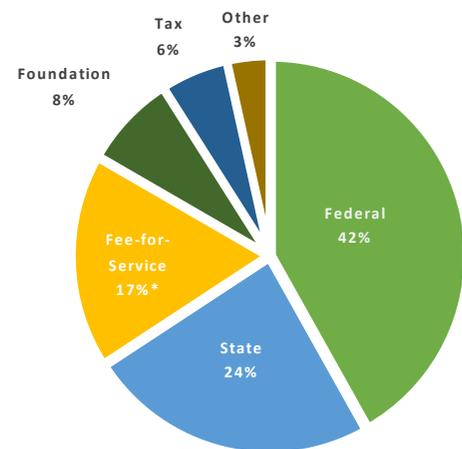
	2017-18	2016-17
<b>ASSETS</b>	\$2,464,368	\$2,247,517
<b>LIABILITIES</b>	\$818,453	\$804,472
<b>NET POSITION*</b>	\$1,645,915	\$1,443,045

\* Net Position consists of unrestricted, short-term restricted, long-term restricted, and net investment in capital assets funds.

## SUMMARY OF INCOME & EXPENSES

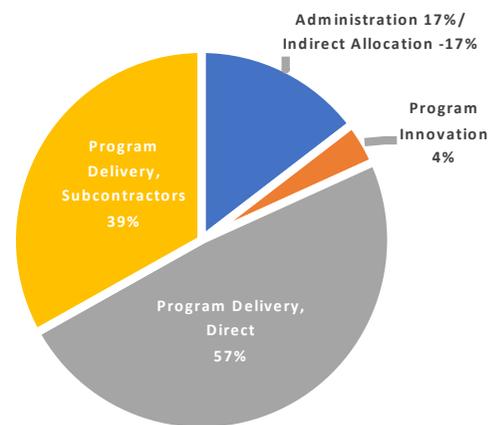
	TOTAL OPERATING
<b>TAX INCOME</b>	\$129,369
<b>PUBLIC FUNDING INCOME</b>	\$1,531,613
<b>PRIVATE/LANDOWNER INCOME</b>	\$512,330
<b>OTHER INCOME</b>	\$80,524
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	(\$2,213,169)
<b>INCREASE IN NET POSITION</b>	\$40,667

## INCOME BY FUNDING SOURCE



\*Fee-for-Service income includes local government and private contracts.

## ANNUAL OPERATING EXPENSES



Sonoma Resource Conservation District is a special district of the State of California, and, as a government entity, is an exempt organization under the provisions of IRC § 115 and contributions to the district are deductible under the provisions of IRC § 170(c)(1). The condensed government-wide financial data for the year ended June 30, 2018 presented above is subject to audit.



## Sonoma RCD Staff

- Valerie Quinto, Executive Director
- Adrienne Pettit, Director of Finance
- Jeff Schreiber, Program Development Manager
- Becky Tillman, District Administrator
- Christine Kuehn, Education & Communications Manager
- Aaron Fairbrook, Program Manager
- Erica Mikesh, Partner Engineer
- Jessica Pollitz, Engineer
- Keith Abeles, Water Resources Specialist
- Jason Wells, Forester
- Kevin Cullinen, Project Manager
- Kari Wester, Project Manager
- Anya Starovoytov, Project Manager
- Katie Robbins, Program Assistant

STAFF THAT DEPARTED THE RCD THIS YEAR – THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE!

- Justin Bodell, Project Manager

## Board of Directors

- John Nagle, Board Chairman
- Walter Ryan, Vice Chairman
- Vickie Mulas, Director
- Dennis Murphy, Director
- Ron Roller, Director
- Bruce Abelli-Amen, Director
- Jennifer Kuszmar, Director
- Earle Cummings, Associate Director
- Delmar Friedrichsen, Emeritus Director



## Participate

in developing a conservation plan or on the ground project to protect soil, water, and wildlife habitat.

## Join us

attend a technical workshop to gain the latest information on resource conservation.

## Invest

in your local RCD with a tax deductible donation to support conservation programming.

## Sign up

to receive our monthly e-newsletter to get the latest updates on RCD programs, funding opportunities, and events. [www.sonomarcd.org](http://www.sonomarcd.org).



*“Friends of the Petaluma River has been fortunate to partner with the Sonoma RCD over the years in support of a healthy and vital Petaluma Watershed. Working with the RCD recently on a Historical Hydrology and Ecology Study of the Petaluma Watershed was especially invaluable as we educate our community about the historic and current functions of the Watershed and explore ways to manage and protect it in the future. The passion and commitment of RCD staff continually elevates the work we do in support of the Petaluma River and we look forward to continuing our work together for many years.”*

*—Stephanie Bastianon, Executive Director,  
Friends of the Petaluma River*



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