



## ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020

OUR MISSION IS TO EMPOWER AND PARTNER WITH LANDOWNERS AND THE COMMUNITY TO ADDRESS SONOMA COUNTY'S MOST PRESSING NATURAL RESOURCE CONCERNS.

SINCE CONSERVATION IS AS MUCH ABOUT PEOPLE AS IT IS ABOUT NATURAL RESOURCES, THIS REPORT REFLECTS THE VOICES OF OUR STAFF AND ILLUSTRATES THE DEDICATION AND YEARS OF PARTNERSHIPS THROUGHOUT OUR DISTRICT'S 878,862 ACRES.

# MESSAGE TO OUR COMMUNITY



As our name implies, the RCD is an organization that focuses on conservation of our working lands and watersheds. While the concept of conservation is a part of everyday life for us, the very idea of conservation is relatively new to modern society. Just over 100 years ago, the idea that the landscape and our resources should be managed sustainably was an absurd notion to most people. It was Teddy Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot (America's first forester) who had the vision and belief that our landscapes should be managed to benefit all the people. And these two men did something about it, establishing the U.S. Forest Service and assigning forest rangers to protect and manage the tremendous forest resources of the West. One could argue that the modern conservation movement started there, in the early 1900s, and continues to grow and evolve to this day as we face new challenges.



And these new challenges are many. The past year has presented a seemingly continuous stream of crises impacting our community and world.

From the devastating wildfires to the existential threat of climate change and a global pandemic, the threats are more real than ever. Will we be able to rise to the current challenge like Roosevelt and Pinchot did over 100 years ago? It's tempting to get discouraged and decide there's nothing we can really do.

However, when we look at the threats we face through our RCD lens, we see that many of the hardest issues can be best addressed through forward-thinking conservation and land management. And that's something we know how to do:

- Wildfire - Forest fuel load management and establishment of shaded fuel breaks
- Climate change - Carbon sequestration through soil health improvement and native plantings
- Pandemic – Supporting our farmers to maintain a local food system that helps carry our community through disruptions in larger-scale food distribution

Through good times and bad, the RCD is hard at work getting these things done on the ground. This annual report presents a whirlwind tour of our District, highlighting a few of our recent accomplishments across the landscape. With your help, we can maintain this momentum and scale up our efforts to meet our community and the world's growing needs. **Working in partnership with landowners, agencies, and non-profits to create more resilient landscapes reminds us that even in hard times there is always something we can do. Together.** We've been at it for 75 years, and we're ready to approach this next phase with creativity, energy, and hope. Are you ready?

*Bulle* *Valerie Q*



# CONSERVATION AT WORK FOR PRODUCTIVE LANDS AND THRIVING STREAMS



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- JACOB MCDANIEL, GRIZZLYCROPS MEMBER

# A SNAPSHOT OF OUR DISTRICT OVER ONE YEAR

The RCD and partners designed and printed the first "2020 Working Lands Calendar" highlighting twelve landowners and managers throughout the county.



Completed 13 rainwater catchment/water storage projects and designed an additional 12 projects that are waiting in the pipeline for implementation.



Designed .5 miles of instream habitat enhancement in Mark West Watershed.



Implemented 50 acres of forest fuel load management practices on properties in Mark West. We completed six Forest Management Plans throughout the district.

Implemented four on-the-ground projects at vineyards in the Sonoma Creek Watershed, including post-fire remediation and completed 14 LandSmart Plans.



Conducted six irrigation evaluations to support water conservation in vineyards.



The RCD hosted or participated in workshops with topics covering soil health, carbon farming, post-fire erosion, and much more serving nearly 300 individuals.



Provided over 120 landowners and community members with free technical assistance on soil erosion and other natural resource concerns.

Completed seven Carbon Farm Plans with one in progress going into our 2020-21 Fiscal Year.



# BALANCING THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE AND FISH

Coastal Watersheds of Sonoma County



THE RURAL AREAS OF WEST SONOMA COUNTY ARE A GREAT EXAMPLE OF WHAT MAKES OUR COUNTY SO SPECIAL. IT'S IMPORTANT THAT WE STEWARD THESE WATERSHEDS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS OF BOTH PEOPLE AND FISH. THE SONOMA COUNTY COASTAL RAINWATER CATCHMENT AND FORBEARANCE PROJECT, FUNDED BY THE CALIFORNIA WILDLIFE CONSERVATION BOARD, IS IN THE PROCESS OF INSTALLING 240,000 GALLONS OF RAINWATER STORAGE ON RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES IN THREE KEY COASTAL WATERSHEDS: GUALALA RIVER, AUSTIN CREEK, AND RUSSIAN GULCH.

## AN INVALUABLE RESOURCE

These three coastal watersheds provide important habitat for endangered coho salmon and threatened steelhead trout. Their streams often go dry or have critically low flows during the summer months, providing a survival risk to juvenile salmonids that remain in the streams over the summer. The rainwater catchment tanks collect rainwater off roofs during the winter, to be used during the summer months for irrigation and other outdoor non-potable uses. The rainwater will offset the existing water source (well, spring, or creek) during the driest time of year, leaving this precious water in the aquifers and streams when it is most needed.

**The project will provide rural residents with additional water security during the uncertain times of drought and climate change that our communities face now and in the future.** In addition to offsetting pumping and encouraging landowners to be more aware of their water use, the stored water may also be used for fire protection, an invaluable resource in our county.



“THE PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT ARE WHAT MAKE IT SO SPECIAL. EVERYONE KNOWS EVERYONE, FROM OUR LOCAL CONTRACTOR, CHARLES HOPE, TO OUR LOCAL PROJECT COORDINATOR, JUDY ROSALES, TO THE PARTICIPATING LANDOWNERS; EVERYONE HAS A PERSONAL CONNECTION AND HELPS TAKE CARE OF ONE ANOTHER OUT IN RURAL WEST COUNTY.

- JESSICA POLLITZ, ENGINEER



**WHILE 240,000 GALLONS SEEMS LIKE A LOT OF WATER, THERE ARE MANY MORE WATERSHEDS AND LANDOWNERS IN WEST SONOMA COUNTY AND THROUGHOUT OUR DISTRICT WHO COULD BENEFIT FROM WINTER WATER STORAGE.** MANY FOLKS IN THESE AREAS ARE ALSO IMPLEMENTING FOREST MANAGEMENT PLANS, WHICH HAVE BEEN LINKED TO INCREASING SUMMER STREAMFLOWS, IN ADDITION TO FIRE RESILIENCY.

# THE GREATEST SLOUGH ON EARTH

Petaluma River Watershed



WE ARE WORKING TO PERPETUATE A COMMUNITY OF ACTIVE, INFORMED, AND ENGAGED STAKEHOLDERS THAT COOPERATIVELY IMPROVE LANDSCAPE FUNCTIONS AND RESOURCE VALUES TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF THE PETALUMA RIVER WATERSHED AND SURROUNDING COMMUNITY. STAKEHOLDERS ACTIVELY ENGAGE AND COLLABORATE TO SHARE UPDATES, CONCERNS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND CHALLENGES WITH EACH OTHER TO PROMOTE AWARENESS AND EXTEND KNOWLEDGE OF EFFORTS WITHIN THE WATERSHED. UNDER THE RCD'S LEAD, THE COLLABORATIVE WILL IDENTIFY AND PRIORITIZE PROJECTS OF VARIOUS SCALES WITHIN THE WATERSHED, UTILIZING AN INCLUSIVE AND COMPREHENSIVE PROCESS THAT INCLUDES COMMUNITY OUTREACH, LEVERAGING EXISTING KNOWLEDGE AND DATA, AND EXERCISING THE STRENGTHS OF EACH PARTICIPATING ENTITY.

What makes this project so powerful is the investment of energy, time, and motivation of 27 local, state, and federal agencies, non-profits, private entities, and local organizations that consistently engage and participate with the collaborative efforts.



## COLLABORATION AT WORK

Through our project efforts we hope to identify and implement solutions and improvements within the watershed to mitigate negative effects associated with climate change, sea level rise, and water quality and quantity impairments that affect us all, while protecting and preserving the economic, recreational, and cultural ecosystem services within our watershed.

**Much of the group consists of dedicated individuals who are invested in the health of the watershed in both their professional and personal lives.** Many participate as volunteers, donating their time and expertise to the collaborative mission. There are also countless more individual landowners and community members that are committed stewards of the land and participants in watershed efforts.

The work doesn't stop there. Utilizing the collaboration and planning work as a foundation, **group members will move beneficial projects through the pipeline of seeking funding, design, community engagement, and on-the-ground action.**



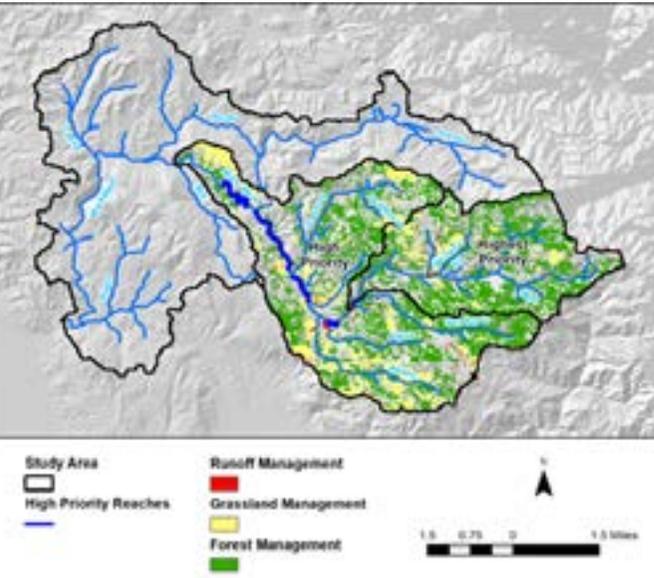
"THE HEALTH OF OUR WATERSHED IS ULTIMATELY TIED TO THE HEALTH OF OUR COMMUNITY."

- KATIE ROBBINS,  
PROJECT MANAGER

# SCIENCE IN ACTION: STREAMFLOW STUDIES PAVE WAY FOR CHANGE

Mark West Creek Watershed

MARK WEST CREEK HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED BY STATE AND FEDERAL FISHERIES AGENCIES AS **PROVIDING SOME OF THE BEST REMAINING HABITAT FOR COHO SALMON IN THE RUSSIAN RIVER WATERSHED AS WELL AS BEING A CORE AREA FOR POPULATION RECOVERY.** THE WATERSHED'S IMPORTANCE TO COHO SALMON, RESTORATION FEASIBILITY, DEGREE OF STREAMFLOW IMPAIRMENT, LANDOWNER INTEREST IN COLLABORATION, AND RANGE OF LAND AND WATER USES MAKE THIS AN IDEAL WATERSHED FOR DEVELOPING A HYDROLOGIC MODEL AND A FLOW ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM.



## A COMMUNITY UNITED

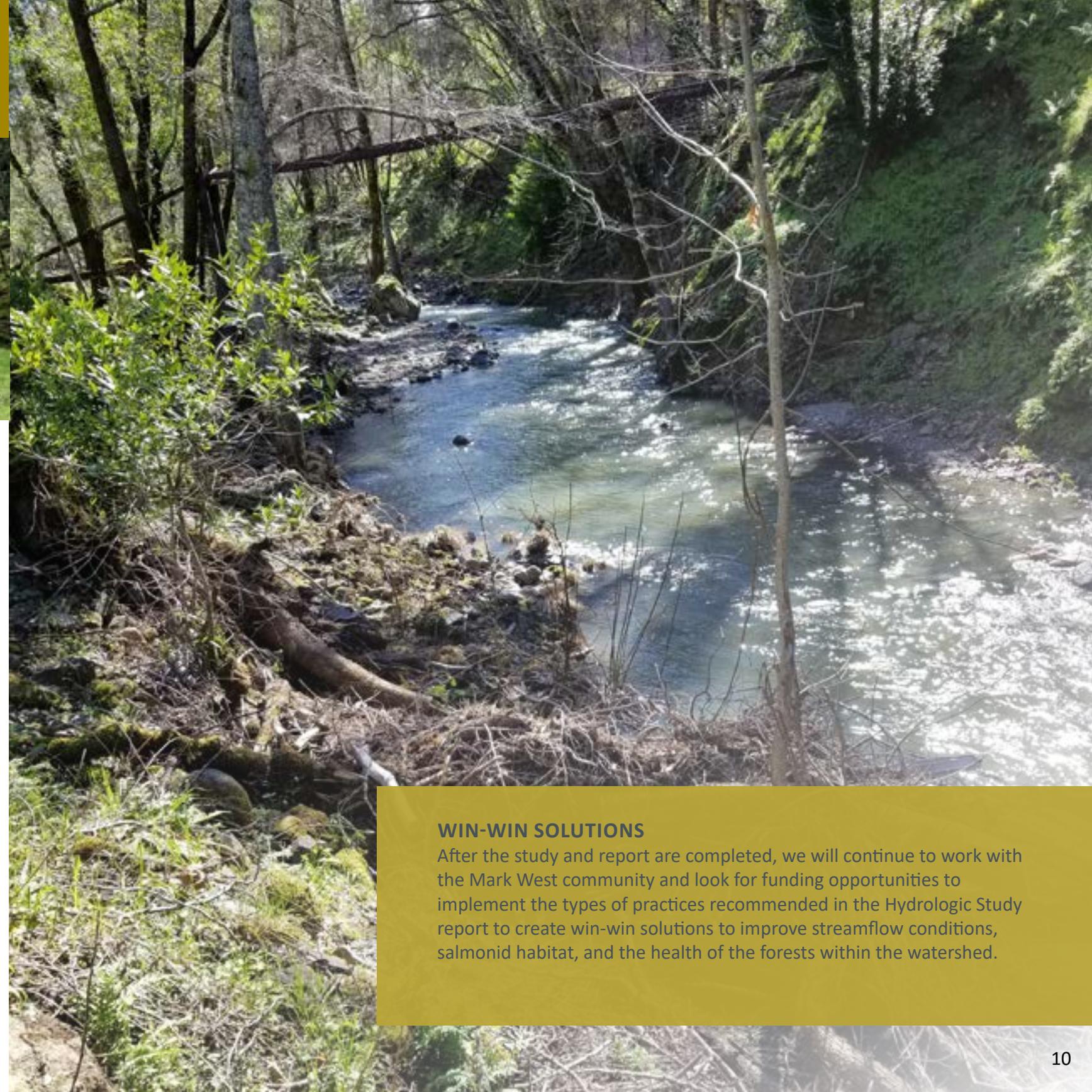
The goal of this study is to perform a comprehensive analysis of the distribution of stream flow in space and time throughout the watershed, relative to coho habitat requirements. This information will assist in identifying and prioritizing restoration efforts and developing strategies for enhancing summer streamflows.

Several factors limit coho survival in the watershed including lack of quality pool habitat, lack of winter refugia, and insufficient summer baseflows. The **results of the Hydrologic Model will guide landowners, land managers, and resource agencies on both what types of projects are likely to have the greatest benefit to streamflow and salmonid habitat, as well as where these projects will be most impactful.**

A handful of watershed residents took part in the study firsthand, by collecting streamflow measurements and rain gauge data that directly contributed to the Hydrologic Model. Many residents also participated and provided input at the series of Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meetings that were held for this study.

“MY FAVORITE ASPECT OF THIS WATERSHED IS HOW INVOLVED AND ENGAGED THE LANDOWNERS ARE PARTICULARLY THE FRIENDS OF MARK WEST WATERSHED GROUP IN IMPROVING THE HEALTH AND RESILIENCE OF THEIR WATERSHED.”

- KEVIN CULLINEN, PROJECT MANAGER



## WIN-WIN SOLUTIONS

After the study and report are completed, we will continue to work with the Mark West community and look for funding opportunities to implement the types of practices recommended in the Hydrologic Study report to create win-win solutions to improve streamflow conditions, salmonid habitat, and the health of the forests within the watershed.

# IN THE FACE OF FIRE: BECOME RESILIENT

Alexander Valley Watersheds

THE VIEW FROM THE TOP OF PINE FLAT ROAD IS SPECTACULAR. IN THE MONTHS LEADING UP TO THE KINCADE FIRE OF FALL 2019, THE RCD HAD BEEN WORKING CLOSELY ON DEVELOPING INDIVIDUAL MANAGEMENT PLANS WITH FORESTLAND OWNERS IN THIS AREA. UNFORTUNATELY, MANY OF THESE PROACTIVE LAND STEWARDS WHO HAD BEEN WORKING TOWARD MORE RESILIENT FORESTS WERE AFFECTED BY THE KINCADE FIRE TO VARYING DEGREES. IN THE WEEKS FOLLOWING THE FIRE THE RCD BEGAN A MAJOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CAMPAIGN IN THE REGION TO SUPPORT LANDOWNERS WITH SOIL EROSION, ROAD ASSESSMENTS, AND FOREST HEALTH CONCERNS. THROUGH THESE EFFORTS, WE WERE ABLE TO CONNECT WITH AND SERVE DOZENS OF FIRE-AFFECTED LANDOWNERS.

## ADAPTING TO WILDFIRE

The adaptable nature of the RCD allowed for quick modifications of the existing forest management plans to reflect a change in the properties after the fire and to get property owners in contact with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for funding assistance. Our Forester worked to find solutions to damaged properties, in many cases finding opportunities to improve forest stands for the future. For example, some landowners can clear Douglas-fir, a fast-growing opportunistic species, from the previously encroached oak woodlands and re-plant native oaks and grasses. Additionally, **as the lands heal and regrow with natives, it is becoming ever more possible to see an increase in prescribed fire use in the Alexander Valley, Pine Flat, and Valley of the Moon areas that were hit hard by recent fires.**



“OUR GOAL IS TO CONTINUE WORKING WITH MOTIVATED COMMUNITIES TO PROVIDE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND ACCESS TO FUNDS FOR PRE-FIRE VEGETATION MANAGEMENT, THEN WORK ON COLLABORATING WITH LOCAL FIRE PERSONNEL TO BRING GOOD FIRE BACK TO THE LANDSCAPE. MY FAVORITE ASPECT OF WORKING HERE HAS BEEN CONNECTING WITH SUCH DEEPLY MOTIVATED AND ETHICAL LAND STEWARDS.”

- JASON WELLS, FORESTER

## PARTNERSHIPS PREVAIL

Although efforts to fund this work as a regional effort has not yet come to fruition, we continue to collaborate closely with the Northern Sonoma County Fire Protection District, Audubon Canyon Ranch, and about 13 landowners, many with contiguous properties, to search for post-fire restoration and maintenance funding. And we continue to provide technical assistance and planning to help our land and forests recover from fire and become more resilient for the future.



## PUTTING PLANS TO WORK

Sonoma Creek Watershed

**TO DATE, WE HAVE DEVELOPED 60 FARM PLANS THROUGH THE LANDSMART PROGRAM AND IMPLEMENTED ON-THE-GROUND PROJECTS RECOMMENDED FROM FARM PLANS ACROSS 5 VINEYARD PROPERTIES, WITH TWO MORE PROJECTS SLATED FOR COMPLETION BEFORE THE CLOSE OF 2020.**



### LANDSMART SUCCESSES ON-THE-GROUND

The RCD has been helping the Sonoma Creek Watershed vineyard community to protect water quality and meet the requirements of a regulatory permit from the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board (Water Board). The Water Board permit requires landowners to prepare a farm plan that documents certain farming practices as well as meet certain criteria that may require natural resource projects, such as improvements to rural roads, on their properties. To date, **we have developed 60 farm plans through the LandSmart program and implemented on-the-ground projects recommended from farm plans across 5 vineyard properties, with two more projects slated for completion before the close of 2020.**



### WATERSHED IMPROVEMENTS

These property improvements include road reshaping, stream crossing improvements, riparian revegetation, and streambank stabilization – all with the goal to reduce the amount of sediment leaving these lands and entering creeks, where it can negatively impact fish habitat and water quality. In addition to projects driven by regulatory requirements, Sonoma RCD also completed emergency erosion control projects at 7 vineyard properties, as part of fire recovery efforts following the Nuns Fire in 2017. Three additional larger-scale fire recovery projects are slated for construction in 2021.

**In recent years Sonoma RCD has brought in over \$720,000 in grant funding for on-the-ground projects to address natural resource concerns in this watershed, paired with technical assistance efforts that bring the total budget to around \$1 million dollars.**



“WORKING IN THIS AREA FOR THE LAST FEW YEARS, I’VE ALSO BEEN LUCKY TO EXPERIENCE THE PASSION, PRIDE, AND FAMILY HISTORY THAT EXISTS AMONG THE LANDOWNERS WHO SHARE SONOMA VALLEY AND CARNEROS REGIONS AS THEIR HOME. I BELIEVE WE’VE FORGED LASTING RELATIONSHIPS FROM OUR ABILITY TO ADAPT IN THE MOMENT AND BE ABLE TO LEND A HELPING HAND AND SOME FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO THOSE NEEDING IT AFTER A NATURAL DISASTER.”

- ANYA STAROVOYTOV, PROJECT MANAGER

# WORKING LANDS THAT INSPIRE: GETTING YOUTH OUT ON THE LAND

Sonoma County Wide

WE OPEN THE MINDS OF STUDENTS TO APPRECIATE THE LANDS AROUND THEM, FOSTER THEIR INDIVIDUAL CONNECTION TO NATURE, AND WE INVITE EACH OF THEM TO ENGAGE IN LEARNING ABOUT HOW THEIR FOOD IS PRODUCED. MANY OF OUR STUDENTS, ESPECIALLY THOSE OF ELEMENTARY AGE HAVE NEVER SET FOOT ON A FARM. MANY OF OUR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS HAVE NOT TASTED NUTRITIOUS FRESH FOOD DIRECTLY FROM FIELD TO FORK. WHAT WE PROVIDE WILL IMPACT THEM FOR A LIFETIME. THESE EXPERIENCES CANNOT BE BOILED DOWN INTO JUST A FEW STATISTICS OF IMPACT, THEY ARE MEASURED BY SMILES, LAUGHS, JOURNAL ENTRIES REFLECTING ON NOVEL OBSERVATIONS, COMMUNICATION AMONG NEW FRIENDS MADE, AND MORE.

OUR PROGRAMS CREATE INFORMED PARTICIPANTS OF OUR COMMUNITY AND BEYOND AS THEY BECOME THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS FOR OUR NATURAL RESOURCES AND VITAL LANDS. **OUR DECADES' LONG PROGRAMS WERE GOING TO LOOK DIFFERENT GOING VIRTUAL, BUT OUR MISSION TO INSPIRE AND EDUCATE THE NEXT GENERATION ABOUT SONOMA COUNTY'S WORKING LANDS, LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS, POLLINATORS, SOIL HEALTH, AND WATERSHED RESILIENCY WOULD REMAIN STRONG.**



"IT IS AN HONOR TO WATCH PURE AMAZEMENT LIGHT UP A STUDENT'S FACE AS THEY EXPERIENCE SOMETHING NOVEL, SOMETHING WE AS ADULTS MIGHT NOT HAVE NOTICED OR FOUND AMUSING. IT IS THIS LIGHT THAT FILLS ME AND DRIVES MY CAREER TO PROVIDE SUCH EXPERIENCES TO OUR STUDENTS IN THIS DIVERSE AND BOUNTIFUL COUNTY."

- CHRISTINE KUEHN, EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER



We will continue to work closely with our partners and schools old and new to ensure the success and access to our programming is upheld no matter what challenge we face. The next generation deserves our perseverance. Our working lands, clean water, healthy soils, and scenic open spaces depend on it.

## INVESTING IN THE NEXT GENERATION

For more than 20 years, Sonoma RCD has provided local youth with unmatched on the land experiences on Sonoma County's diverse agricultural lands and open spaces. The way we teach, and design experiential field trips is always evolving. However, our greatest challenge came last spring as the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered our community and others across the United States. Our team, in collaboration with Gold Ridge RCD, studiously and thoughtfully spent time re-envisioning all our on the land youth programs anticipating the following 2020-21 school year still leaving students out of their classrooms.

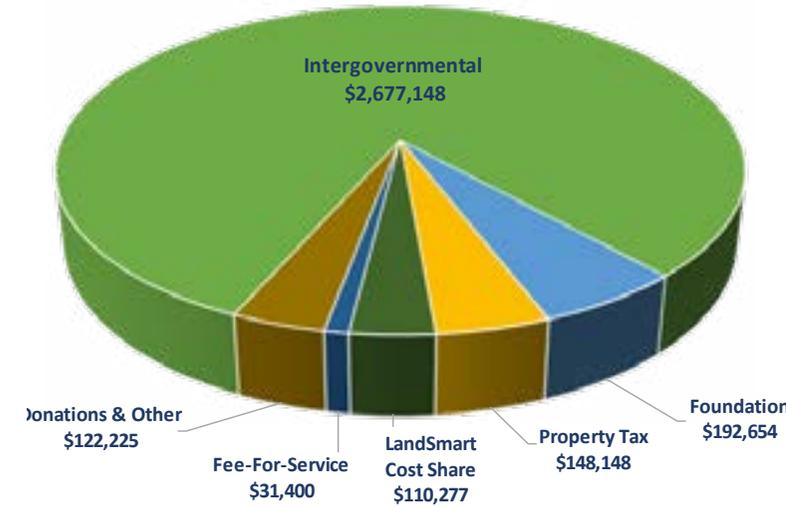
Our TEAM (Teaching Agricultural and Environmental Memories) Educational Program supports an array of Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), while the FARMS (Farming Agriculture Resource Management Sustainability) Leadership program aims to integrate STEM connections, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) tools, and provide opportunities for high schoolers to develop career pathways. It is our goal to provide thoughtful, well-rounded, and equitable programming to our diverse and brilliant student community. These programs are each supported, in part, by Sonoma County Ag + Open Space as we integrate curriculum that speaks to the role of the district in protecting our county's land resources forever and whose work is funded by the taxpayers of Sonoma County.



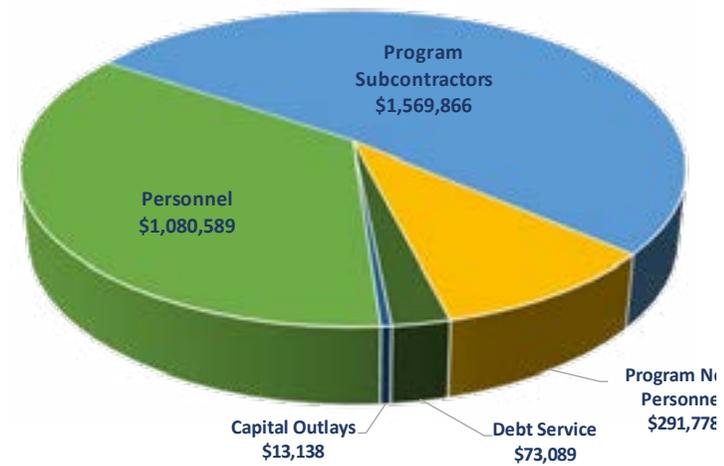
# FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS | 2019-2020

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 FINANCIAL DATA FOR THE YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2020 PRESENTED BELOW IS SUBJECT TO AUDIT.

## REVENUE & OTHER FUNDING SOURCES

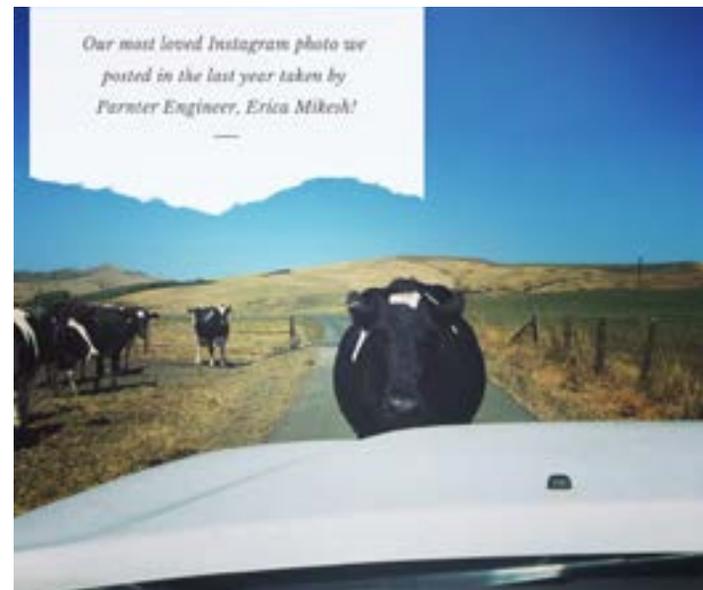


## OPERATING EXPENDITURES



## THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS DONORS

- |                   |                              |
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# THE FACES OF THE RCD





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