



Annual Report 2020-2021



CELEBRATING **75** YEARS OF SUPPORTING CONSERVATION AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES.

A letter from your RCD.

Dear Friends of the RCD,

We certainly live in interesting times. We can hardly believe a year has passed since we last shared an annual report with our community. At that time, we were 6 months into a new reality of remote work, social distancing, and so much hand sanitizer. As of today, we've been on this roller coaster for about 18 months, with that mythical finish line moving ever further away. When viewed in that light, the past year can start to feel like a period of suspended animation, and it can be tempting to forget the progress we've made.

When we look closer, however, we see that our 20-21 fiscal year was marked with great progress. We stayed the course with long-running successful programs, helping people with water conservation and storage, post-fire land management, carbon sequestration, and more. We tried new things with great results, including connecting online with 150 school age children providing much-needed diversity to a challenging academic year, and distributing monarch butterfly habitat kits to 100 community members. Read on in this report for more detail on the year's accomplishments!

In these unusual present times, we also invested in our future by conducting in-depth planning efforts. Our board and staff engaged together to develop a strategic plan that will guide our next 3 years of work. This plan emphasizes expanding our reach in the community, while doing internal work that will strengthen our capacity to serve.

We also engaged with the County's Hazard Mitigation Planning process, for the first time developing hazard mitigation actions for the RCD that will expand our options for mitigating disaster impacts to our District's natural resources.

The past year has presented challenges, successes, grief, joy, fear, and hope. As we so often do, we choose to move into this next year with a renewed emphasis on hope. We are grateful for a strong community and a beautiful place to live and work. We are inspired by the landowners and managers who continue to prioritize conservation, and humbled by the trust they place in us as we work together. The future is bright, and we're in it together.

In Partnership,



Valerie Quinto
Executive Director



Bruce Abelli-Amen
Board Chairman

A YEAR WE WILL NOT SOON FORGET



DEDICATED TO OUR MISSION SINCE 1946

Our Mission | Bridging the needs of the community and natural resources by empowering people through reliable expertise and action to strengthen the resilience of Sonoma County.

Our Vision | Sonoma RCD sees a future where the natural resources of Sonoma County are abundant and available for the benefit of all people, agriculture, ecosystems and the economy.

For 75 years, we have collaborated to drive win-win solutions for conservation locally, regionally and statewide. As a special district of the State of California, the RCD is organized to support natural resource management solutions through partnerships with individuals, organizations, and agencies. Our district covers 919,000 acres, or over 85% of Sonoma County and includes the Russian River, Petaluma River, Sonoma Creek, Stemple Creek, and Gualala River Watersheds.

We work under a programmatic umbrella called LandSmart®. The LandSmart Program is carried out through partnerships with landowners striving to achieve productive lands and thriving streams. It is a regional collaborative with Napa County, Gold Ridge, and Mendocino County RCDs. The purpose of this collaborative is to provide consistent services across a broad geography while being responsive to local needs, and to leverage the expertise of neighboring RCDs to provide services greater than those we could deliver alone.

Number of people supported by technical assistance in 2020-2021

146 individuals

Total funding secured for conservation planning and on the ground projects

\$3.8 million

Number of square miles evaluated in the Mark West Creek to help inform future projects that will benefit both fish and people in the watershed.

40 square miles

Salt Point State Park coastline.



A GLANCE BACK AT 75 YEARS



1946 - Established as the Central Sonoma County (Santa Rosa) Soil Conservation District



1953 - Sotoyome Soil Conservation District was created



1956 - Petaluma Soil Conservation District was assembled by dedicated agriculturalists.



1980s - Flood protection, vineyard erosion control, and animal waste management were primary focus areas of the districts

1949 - Sonoma Valley Soil Conservation District was started



1930s - Dust Bowl devastated the United States and spawned the need of better soil conservation efforts in agriculture



1970 - Soil Conservation Districts became known as "Resource Conservation Districts"



1975 - Sotoyome and Santa Rosa RCD merged to be known as Sotoyome-Santa Rosa RCD



1950s - The Central Sonoma Watershed Project launched to address flooding issues





1986 - Sonoma Valley and Petaluma RCDs merged to become Southern Sonoma RCD



1998 - FARMS Leadership program was started in Sonoma County



2013 - Merged Southern Sonoma and Sotoyome RCDs to offer more comprehensive services to our partners

2017 - The first year Sonoma County experienced devastating wildfire since the 1960s



2021 - Completed three-year Strategic Plan to guide programmatic services and support internal efficiencies

1985 - Sonoma County Board of Supervisors designated April as Soil Conservation Month to celebrate 50th anniversary of the Soil and Water Conservation Movement in the United States



2012 - LandSmart® was created to support regional conservation collaboration



2016 - Sonoma RCD received a Gold Resolution from the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors Recognizing the Sonoma RCD's 70 years of service to our community

2020 - Launched the North Bay Forest Improvement Program



2018 - First year compost was applied to Healthy Soils Demonstration projects in Sonoma County



This timeline is only for representative purposes only, not to scale.

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY AND WATERSHED RESILIENCE



Provided **85 technical assistance site visits** to post-fire properties including the most recent Glass Fire in August of 2020.



Completed **65 acres of fuel load reduction** projects in the Upper Mark West watershed including thinning, removal of burned material, pile burning, and limbing up healthy trees.



Launched North Bay Forest Improvement Program and selected **five projects in Sonoma County** for funding in phase one selection.



Participated in the Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan development led by the County of Sonoma.

Supported 250 wildfire survivors through technical assistance site visits, virtual community events, and restoration projects including fuel load reduction efforts.

Below: One of a few large rainwater catchment systems installed in the Mark West Watershed that survived the 2020 Glass fire to aid in the firefight.





“Sonoma Resource Conservation District is a trusted partner in the Upper Mark West Watershed. RCD Staff have responded to our calls for technical expertise following the 2017 Tubbs Fire and the 2020 Glass Fire. They have provided landowners with Forest Management Plans and brought grants from numerous agencies to improve forest health, remove fuel loads and improve aquatic life by reducing silt into Mark West Creek. We especially appreciate their latest efforts (funded by Sonoma County) to create 100’ defensible space around homes and to maintain an important ridge-top fire-break. The benefits of these projects go well beyond the boundaries of our watershed, and we simply couldn’t do this work without RCDs support.”

Lynn Garric | Land Steward
Mark West Watershed



PRODUCTIVE LANDS AND THRIVING STREAMS



Completed **16 LandSmart Conservation Plans and Carbon Farm Plans** on rangeland, vineyard, confined animal and dairy properties that identify best management practices to enhance natural resources while supporting operations economically.



Secured funding through RestoreCA to **implement carbon farming practices** identified in Carbon Farm Plans.



Designed four rainwater catchment systems and streamflow enhancement projects in watersheds with critical flow concerns and endangered salmonid populations.



Conducted **5 irrigation evaluations** to aid vineyard managers with their water conservation and efficiency goals during the drought.



Completed **15 hedgerow and riparian planting** designs.



Provided **technical assistance to 61 properties** ranging from on soil erosion concerns, climate adaptations measures, forest health, and other natural resource concerns.

53 acres of rangeland were treated with compost during year three of our Healthy Soils Demonstration Project with Sonoma Mountain Institute and 20 vineyard acres received compost in partnership with Jackson Family Wines.

Left: Overcast LandSmart planning field visit to Sonoma Valley vineyard where the RCD has played a critical role in supporting land managers with soil health goals and water quality regulations.



“Straus Family Creamery’s mission is to sustain family farms in Marin and Sonoma County and we are proud to source our premium, organic milk from 12 local dairies. Reducing our climate impact is an important part of this mission, we believe the future of dairy farming depends on it. The Sonoma RCD is an essential partner in advancing our goals for sustainable farming. Sonoma RCD staff provide the technical assistance needed to help local dairy farmers successfully implement regenerative practices that improve soil health and sequester carbon. They understand the complexities of farm management and offer solutions tailored to the specific operational and ecological conditions on each farm.”

Beatrix Scolari |
Sustainability Programs Specialist
Straus Family Creamery

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY DURING THE PANDEMIC



Sonoma and Gold Ridge RCDs distributed Monarch Plant Kits to **100 local community members** to increase Monarch butterfly and pollinator habitat in Sonoma County.



Staff **hosted seven virtual community events reaching over 521 people** and ranging in subject matter from post-fire technical workshops to our annual Soil Health Symposium, from a Petaluma Baylands Strategy session to farming during drought.



TEAM went virtual! Education staff from Sonoma and Gold Ridge RCD partnered with Sonoma County Ag + Open Space to take local elementary students on an asynchronous field trip to Open Field Farm, a protected organic, biodynamic CSA farm located in Petaluma. The program supported NGSS standards for the 3rd-5th grade band. Reaching **135 students** in the first few months!



FARMS Leadership offered **four live virtual sessions for high school students** during the spring semester to learn about and engage with topics ranging from forest health basics to Traditional Ecological Knowledge and soil health and farm biodiversity.



The North Coast Soil Health Hub hosted the fourth annual Soil Health Symposium which logged 200 participants on day one and 150 on day two. The event featured regional speakers and others from Southern California and Oregon.

Left: Monarch butterfly habitat kits each included two native milkweed plants, three nectar plants, and plant care information and resources.



"The FARMS program was an amazing program for me because it helped me learn more about all nature has to offer here in Sonoma County as well as people from my community that helping reduce climate change by working with nature and not against it. This program also helped me connect with students that shared the same love I had with nature and farming. In all this program was not only fun but educational and taught me things I didn't know about my community."

Bryan Gutierrez Briceno | Senior Student
Casa Grande High School

CAPACITY AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

-  Secured **\$3.8 million dollars** in federal, state and local grants to improve forest health, increase carbon sequestration in our soils, protect critical water supplies that support salmonid populations, and further drought resiliency on our landscape.
-  Partnered with GrizzlyCorps a program of Americorps to build the RCD's capacity around carbon farming and forest management.
-  Hired a Staff Accountant and Office Assistant to aid in RCD internal fiscal and administrative functions.
-  Updated and developed a new Strategic Plan for 2021-2023 with board and staff participation.
-  Completed a comprehensive IT Plan that will guide future technological upgrades to support staff and RCD operations.

Installed 80,000 gallons of rainwater catchment at seven different properties in the Austin Creek, Gualala River, and Russian Gulch watersheds.

Below: We designed water storage tank signage for our completed catchment systems that were installed as part of our Sonoma County Streamflow Enhancement Project in the Coastal Watersheds.



"I am truly so grateful for the partnership between the Sonoma RCD and NRCS! Through collaborative efforts I believe we are providing critical assistance to the agricultural community in addressing resource concerns and getting conservation on the ground. I feel lucky to work with partners who are leaders in conservation, not only locally, but in the nation."

Drew Loganbill | District Conservationist
USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service



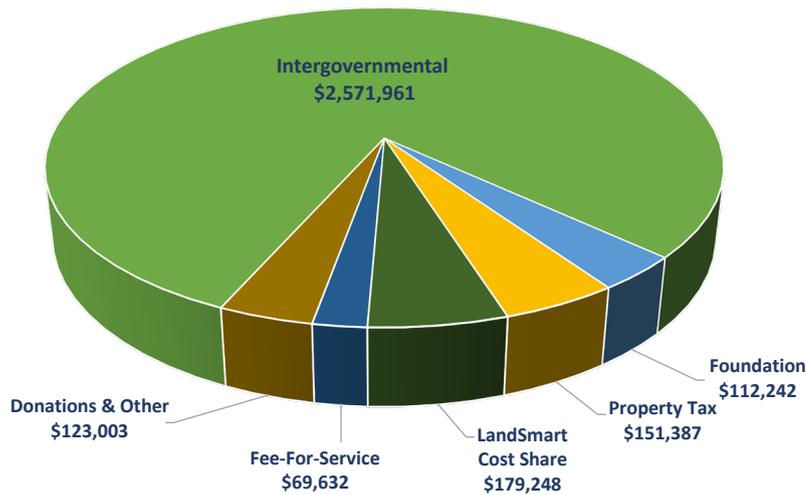
Photo from the Petaluma Argus-Courier
taken by USDA-NRCS Petaluma Field Office Staff

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

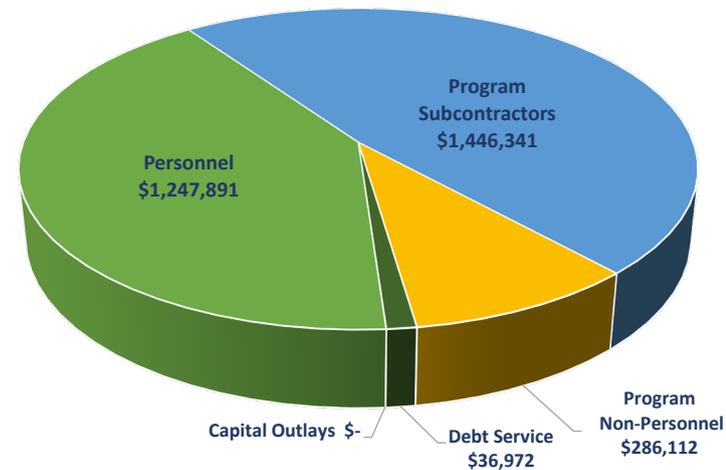
2020-2021

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, 2021 presented below is subject to audit.

REVENUE & OTHER FUNDING SOURCES



OPERATING EXPENDITURES



THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS DONORS

Anonymous
 John C. Mills
 Frank H. Bartholomew Foundation
 Justin Tulloss
 Bruce Abelli-Amen
 Barbara Moulton
 Karen Arroyo
 Harold Appleton
 Cari Harty

Lynn Garric
 Leah C. Stebbins
 CVV Healdsburg, LLC
 Annabelle Breakey
 SoCo Hemp Corp.
 Sonoma Alliance for Vineyards & Environment
 Sonoma County Farm Bureau
 Valerie Quinto

Project Manager Kevin Cullinen surveying
at Salt Point on the Sonoma Coast.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the partners and community members who value the RCD's unique role in restoring, protecting and ensuring the resiliency of our landscapes for all. Our work truly is a team effort, extending beyond our Board and staff to our organizational partners, funders, contractors, participating students, teachers, and community members. And of course, our work would not be possible without the landowners and managers who invite us onto their property to work side by side in conservation.

RCD Board

Bruce Abelli-Amen, Chair

John Nagle, Vice Chair

Walt Ryan, Director

Jennifer Kuszmar, Director

Vickie Mulas, Director

Ron Roller, Director

Ariana Reguzzoni, Director

Beth Bruzzone, Associate Director

Dennis Murphy, Associate Director

Delmar Friedrichsen, Emeritus Director

Earle Cummings, Emeritus Director

RCD Staff

Valerie Quinto, Executive Director

Adrienne Pettit, Director of Finance

Wendi Asuncion, Staff Accountant

Kristopher Ballard, Office Assistant

Christine Kuehn, Education and Communications Manager

Aaron Fairbrook, Program Manager

Erica Mikesh, Partner Engineer

Jessica Pollitz, Engineer

Keith Abeles, Soil and Water Specialist

Jason Wells, Forester

Kevin Cullinen, Project Manager

Kari Wester, Project Manager

Anya Starovoytov, Project Manager

Katie Robbins, Project Manager

Shannon Drew, Program Assistant

Robert Heim, Program Assistant

Jacob McDaniel, GrizzlyCorps Fellow 2020-21



Above: Western Columbine *Aquilegia formosa* found while on a site visit earlier this year by staff at Pepperwood Preserve.

Front cover: Engineer Jessica Pollitz visiting a site with Program Manager Aaron Fairbrook in the Mark West watershed.

Back cover: Cattle at the Jenner Headlands Preserve.

Project Manager Anya Starovoytov with contractor Steve Pye of Spye General Engineering taking a break to talk about a post-fire culvert replacement project in the Mill Creek watershed.





S O N O M A
RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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