



# Annual Report

2003-2004

Santa Cruz County Resource Conservation District

SUMMER 2004

## The Santa Cruz County RCD Year in Review

The District has had a busy year. We concluded the Soquel Creek Watershed Assessment and Enhancement Project Plan and have solidified new partnerships at the local, state, and federal level to move our programs and technical assistance services towards more on-the-ground projects. One of the biggest constraints to implementing conservation is the permitting process and the costs and time associated with it. The District has received funding from the State Coastal Conservancy to develop a Permit Coordination Program for Santa Cruz County that will maintain environmental requirements but enable more landowners and land managers to implement conservation practices in a timely and less cumbersome manner.

In addition, the District convened a Stewardship Group and Local Working Group to discuss and prioritize resource concerns for Santa Cruz County. Those recommendations will be used to help guide the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in their prioritization of Farm

Bill Programs for Santa Cruz County. In addition to resource concerns, the District updated the cost list for implementation of practices listed for the NRCS. The actual costs to implement conservation on the Central Coast are much higher than other areas of the state. As a result, the Farm Bill Program in Santa Cruz County has been underutilized in part because reimbursement amounts have not met actual costs of doing business. The updated cost list will help NRCS better meet the conservation needs of Santa Cruz County and its implementation of Farm Bill Programs.

The District is contemplating the year ahead with enthusiasm. There are several programs that are underway as well as new projects under development. The Integrated Watershed Restoration Program, Permit Coordination Program, Roads Cost-Share Program and a strong partnership with the NRCS are helping the District reach out to more landowners and land managers and provide outreach, education and technical assistance services more effectively.

## NRCS and RCD - A Cooperative Partnership

The NRCS and the Santa Cruz County RCD have had a productive and cooperative partnership for many years. This past year was no exception. In fact, the accomplishments of these two partners in 2003 afford an excellent example of what may be accomplished with hard work, enthusiasm, and collaboration.

NRCS and the Santa Cruz County RCD have given numerous workshops and technical training, including the San Lorenzo Valley Watershed Roads training for contractors, Farm Water Quality Short Courses, development of educational materials, and outreach to landowners in Santa Cruz County. Together, they have provided education to children through visits to Minte White Elementary School in Watsonville, and the Santa Cruz County Fair, World of Water "Rock N' Soil Madness" booth.

NRCS provided technical assistance for workshops and trainings and participated in Technical Advisory Committees (TACs) for the Soquel Watershed Assessment Plan, the San Lorenzo Valley Watershed Roads

Grant, Interagency Committees (IAC), Watsonville Stewardship Committee Meetings, and "road walks" with road associations. Educational materials have been developed by Earth Team Volunteers and California State University Monterey Bay interns, and through Cooperative Agreements.

The NRCS and the RCD have worked together to establish the first county-wide permit coordination program and are embarking on a permit coordination program for irrigation pond development for northern coastal Santa Cruz County.

The NRCS and the RCD worked closely to implement four rural road improvement projects in the San Lorenzo Valley Watershed, and two projects within the Watsonville Sloughs Watershed.

The RCD has supported the NRCS' increasingly administrative workload by participating in Cooperative Agreements to hire temporary additional staff, allowing NRCS staff to dedicate additional time to RCD projects.



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#### Our Mission

To help people protect, conserve and restore natural resources through information, education and technical assistance programs.

#### RCD Board of Directors

Jim McKenna, President  
Steve Butler, Director  
Howard Liebenberg, Director  
Tom Lukens, Director  
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Roberta Smith, Director  
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#### RCD Staff

Morpheus Anima  
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Sharon Corkrean  
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Experienced Laborer

Portia Halbert  
Entry Level Ecologist

Bobbie Haver  
Watershed Coordinator

Dawn Mathes  
Watershed Coordinator

Jen Stern  
Watershed Coordinator

**NRCS Staff**

Kelli Camara  
Soil Conservationist

Richard Casale  
District Conservationist

Craig Ficenc  
Conservation Engineer

## San Lorenzo Roads Cost Share Program

In March 2003, the SCCRCDC was awarded a 319(h) Clean Water Act grant from the State Water Resources Control Board for *Cost-Share Implementation of Erosion and Sediment Control Best Management Practices for Private Roads in the San Lorenzo River Watershed*. The San Lorenzo River is on the State Water Resources Control Board's list of impaired water bodies for sediment /siltation. The focus on roads comes from the results of studies done on sediment sources in the San Lorenzo River Watershed, including the *San Lorenzo Watershed Management Plan* and the *San Lorenzo Watershed Total Maximum Daily Load Report*. These have identified poor construction and maintenance of road networks in the watershed as a major source of sediment impacting the water quality of the San Lorenzo River and its tributaries.

Specific accomplishments of the Cost-Share program include the following:

- Conducted a Roads Technical Training and Demonstration for contractors and road associations.
- Facilitated a Photo-monitoring Training for the participating road associations to monitor the success of their projects, conducted by the Coastal Watershed Council.
- Implemented four road drainage improvement projects.
- Public outreach and education events including a well-attended public workshop, public tour, and newsletter.



Installing a waterbar at the Roads Technical Training Workshop.

The first year of this four-year project has been very successful. Collaboration with private road associations, the Technical Advisory Committee, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and local agencies has helped to develop important relationships for future roads projects. This gives private road associations a resource they can tap into for information and assistance in conducting road drainage improvements. San Lorenzo steelhead will no doubt breathe a little easier in 2004.

## Integrated Watershed Restoration Program

The District will administer a \$4.5 million grant from the California Coastal Conservancy. This grant will fund more than 100 watershed restoration projects—the largest concentration of watershed restoration projects in the state. The “Integrated Watershed Restoration Plan” is a five-year plan coordinated by city, county, and local groups in Santa Cruz County to prioritize watershed projects. The Department of Fish and Game and the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board have also funded elements of the plan. Seven watersheds in Santa Cruz County are included: Scotts Creek, San Lorenzo River, Arana Gulch, Soquel Creek, Aptos Creek, Watsonville Sloughs and the lower Pajaro River tributaries. The plan focuses on:

- Fish passage and instream habitat restoration.
- Road-related-erosion control and riparian restoration.
- Permit coordination for 55 projects provided by the RCD.
- Lagoons and sloughs.
- Watershed restoration monitoring.
- Outreach and education.

This is the first time that three state agencies--the Coastal Conservancy, the Department of Fish and Game and the Regional Water Quality Control Board--have acted in concert to leverage watershed grant programs, said former Santa Cruz County Supervisor Jeff Almquist: “This approach ensures that the highest-priority projects are the ones that get funded.” For more information visit the IWRP website at [www.iwrp.sccrcd.org](http://www.iwrp.sccrcd.org)

## Santa Cruz County Fuel Load Reduction and Outreach Program

The Santa Cruz County Resource Conservation District is assisting in fire prevention in the San Lorenzo Valley through the implementation of the Santa Cruz County Fuel Load Reduction and Outreach Program. This program is funded through a grant from the Sacramento Region Community Foundation's Community-Based Wildfire Prevention Grants Program 2003/2004. The goals of this program are to increase fire prevention awareness through implementation of fuel load reduction projects, distribution of fire prevention information, and presentation of educational workshops.

The program components include:

- Implementation of the Fuel-Load Reduction Project in collaboration with the Huckleberry Woods Property Owners Association (Boulder Creek) and the Natural Resources and Employment Program of the Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County



Fuel load reduction workshop

(January 2004).

- Implementation of two fuel load reduction projects at Loch Lomond Reservoir in collaboration with the City of Santa Cruz Water Department and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.
  - Implementation of fuel-load-reduction projects in the San Lorenzo Watershed in collaboration with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and local fire protection districts.
  - Fuel load reduction and fire safety education and outreach in collaboration with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and local fire protection districts.
  - Printing and distribution of 10,000 *Living with Fire in Santa Cruz County* brochures in collaboration with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and local fire protection districts. The brochure is available on our website at [www.sccrcd.org](http://www.sccrcd.org).

## Fiscal Year 2003 Budget

### Income Sources

Interest	\$2,105
Local & Private Sources	\$16,130
Augmentation Funds	\$36,128
Other Revenue Grants	\$659,165
<b>Total</b>	<b>*\$713,528</b>

### Expenses

Outside Professional Services	\$322,952
Salaries	\$268,049
Office, Insurance, Audit	\$45,763
Mileage & Transportation	\$1,801
<b>Total</b>	<b>*\$638,565</b>

\*The difference between income and expenses represents grant money allocated to the RCD and not yet spent.

## Arana Gulch Watershed Alliance

The Arana Gulch Watershed Alliance (AGWA) office has moved eight times in the past five years. Our new office location is in the Arana Watershed at the Santa Cruz Boat Harbor, hosted by the Santa Cruz Port District. The watershed work creeps along as funding is sought for implementation of Arana's Enhancement Plan Projects. Last year saw an increase in interest in Arana's program, from the Army Corps engineers to local government. The Port District seeks assistance to deal with the sediments coming into the Harbor from the Arana Watershed. This need emphasizes the importance of implementing the restoration projects identified in the enhancement plan.

A bittersweet success story is unfinished at the culvert removal and flat-car bridge project on private land in Arana. AGWA, working with the cooperative landowner for the project,

has received all required permits. However, the building permit took longer than expected. Funding time ran out before implementation of the project was completed. This ongoing demonstration project is designed to improve fish passage and secure access to the homeowner's residence. AGWA has successfully extended the building permit for six months and continues to seek implementation funding.



Sediment deposits in the North Harbor

AGWA has three first-phase, high priority projects in the IWRP project. The first one to start up is the Blue Trail Gully repair. Next will be two gullies in DeLaveaga City Parkland. There is an annual sediment basin clean-out project at Harbor High School to be coordinated this year and ongoing public outreach to be conducted. Local school groups continue to make site visits at the Harbor High fish ladder and sediment basin to pick up trash and remove exotic plants. For more information regarding AGWA please visit their website at [www.aranagulch.org](http://www.aranagulch.org).

## State Parks

The District has funded two positions within the California State Parks, one entry level resource ecologist, and an experienced laborer. For the past three years, this partnership has contributed to the success of habitat restoration in our local State Parks. The following are some of the projects on which this partnership has collaborated.

At Sunset State Beach, fire has been used as a tool for controlling *Ammophila*, a non-native grass which thrives in the dunes. Though the sites require continued maintenance to control the *Ammophila* invasion, once removed, the native flora rebounds quickly.

Prescribed burning is a tool regularly used at Big Basin State Park to reduce the fuel load. Each Fall, State Parks, CDF and local fire crews work together to create natural fuel breaks. These prescribed burns serve to mimic low-intensity fires which once burned periodically in local forests.

At many of our local State Parks weed management is a serious concern. At Twin Lakes State Park crews have been

working since the mid-90s to remove French broom. French broom is a non-native, invasive that successfully chokes the meadows, and is a potential fire hazard. Though most meadows are open now, these sites continue to require maintenance to remove the reestablishing seedlings.

Henry Cowell State Park has been working diligently to remove *Vinca* from along the River Trail. Like English Ivy in Nisene Marks, *Vinca* carpets the forest floor with a dense mat which inhibits the growth of other vegetation. After removal of the invaders, the native flora often reestablishes itself unaided. Crews may also revegetate with natives to encourage reestablishment.

Eucalyptus is another aggressive non-native receiving attention from State Parks crews. Due to its volatile oils and rapid growth, Eucalyptus poses a serious fire concern. At Wilder Ranch and Manresa crews cut and treat Eucalyptus; the slash is then piled and burned.

## Outreach, Education & Technical Assistance for the San Lorenzo Watershed

In May 2003, the Santa Cruz County Resource Conservation District (RCD) was awarded California Coastal Salmon Recovery Program funds administered by the California Department of Fish and Game for Watershed Outreach, Education & Technical Assistance for the San Lorenzo Watershed. This program was created to provide rural San Lorenzo Watershed residents with this assistance.

The RCD has been busy collaborating with Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park interpretive staff on design and text for an interpretive sign depicting steelhead trout and coho salmon life cycles and habitat requirements.



**Outreach and Education Workshops.**

An interpretive sign and brochure is in the works for the Lower San Lorenzo River near the lagoon. These will concentrate on the importance of the San Lorenzo Lagoon ecosystem to the survival of steelhead trout and coho salmon. This sign and brochure are being developed in collaboration with the City of Santa Cruz.

The RCD also coordinated with Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park interpretive staff on the Migration Festival Event held in February of 2004. The RCD developed and presented a display on water quality and a display on the salmonid life cycle at the event.

## Soquel Watershed

The Soquel Creek Watershed Enhancement Draft Plan was completed in the Fall of 2003. The public comments were received by the end of summer and, after careful consideration of each of the comments, the final report was delivered to the Department of Fish and Game in January of 2004.

In May 2003, the Santa Cruz County Resource Conservation District (RCD) was awarded Coastal Salmon Recovery Program funds administered by the California Department of Fish and Game for the Soquel Creek Watershed Assessment and Enhancement Implementation Program. This program was created to provide Soquel Watershed residents with outreach, education and technical assistance. As a result the following outreach and education projects have been completed.

- An educational Large Woody Material brochure has been developed with contributions from the County of Santa Cruz and the Soquel State Demonstration Forest among other local resources.
- An informative and educational Large Woody Material

workshop was held in the spring of 2004 at the Soquel State Demonstration Forest.

Also in the watershed, the district is working with Friends of Soquel Creek to remove *Arundo donax*, the invasive bamboo-like grass which exists at five sites along Soquel Creek. This grass spreads quickly and crowds out native plants; it can grow up to four inches a day and up to 30' tall. It robs creeks of water, destroying fish and wildlife habitat. The thick thatch that is produced can cause wildfires and creates erosion and flooding problems. We are currently seeking funding for *Arundo* removal.



***Arundo donax* thickets.**

## Beach Road Revegetation Project

Between the farms of the Pajaro Valley and the wetlands and estuaries around Monterey Bay are tens of miles of ditches, acres of land unusable for farming but ideal for water quality improvement. For example, vegetated waterways provide a variety of mechanisms for the degradation of refractory compounds, including oxidation, reduction, hydrolysis,



**The demonstration project established in the fall of 2000**

photolysis, volatilization, and metabolic processes.

The Beach Road agricultural drainage ditch includes three miles of unvegetated ditch bank. The RCD, with funding from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and match contributions from Pajaro Valley Water

Management Agency, Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau, County of Santa Cruz Department of Public Works, City of Watsonville and the RCD of Monterey County, worked with six of the major growers in the Pajaro Valley to vegetate over three linear miles of ditch.

The approach to reaching this point was to understand both the farmer's perspective and natural resource science and to find common ground between the two. Ditches left

unmanaged quickly become colonized with weeds and pests. In response to these concerns farmers apply pesticides to control weeds, leaving banks unprotected and allowing for the mobilization of pesticide residues with bank erosion. Mechanical channel maintenance eliminates remaining vegetation and further destabilizes the banks. Bank erosion combines with unmanaged sediment sources upstream to plug culverts, which limits channel capacity and causes flooding. The disturbed soils left behind are prime habitat for weeds and pests, necessitating the further use of chemical and mechanical control. Planting native grasses can break this cycle.

This project established a strip of green native vegetation from Watsonville to Sunset State Beach that will work every day to improve water quality. Beach Road is among the



**The ditch after planting with creeping wild rye *Leymus triticoides*.**

most traveled roads in the Pajaro Valley, and this project has become a billboard for conservation for the entire region. Growers along Beach Road are part of the Farm Bureau's Lower Pajaro Watershed Working Group. The Farm Bureau played an important and integral role in reaching out to the agricultural community and working with the growers to establish the planting project.

## Pajaro Watershed Water Quality Protection Program

The RCD was approved for \$2.3 million of funding from the State Water Resources Control Board for the Watsonville Sloughs and greater Pajaro Watershed. This funding is the result of collaboration between the RCDs of Santa Cruz County, San Benito County, and Loma Prieta, as well as the County of Santa Cruz, the City of Watsonville, County Farm Bureaus of San Mateo, Santa Cruz, San Benito and Santa Clara and the Coalition of Central Coast County Farm Bureaus. The goals of the Pajaro River Watershed project are to:

- Actively involve the urban and agricultural communities in water quality protection and wetland restoration.
- Support the Farm Bureau's outreach, while implementing 16 agricultural water-quality demonstration projects.
- In the Watsonville Sloughs, design and construct a wetland restoration and agricultural drainage system to be used as a model for both urban and agricultural watershed stewardship.
- Restore two sites of critical wetland habitat in Watsonville Sloughs.

- Carry out a public urban runoff education campaign and implement urban stormwater management measures.
- Facilitate a watershed-wide urban and agricultural stewardship program.

### What is the Santa Cruz County RCD and what is its relationship to the NRCS?

*The Santa Cruz County Resource Conservation District ("the District") is a special district organized under state law. The District is also a public resource agency and has no enforcement or regulatory functions. The District works closely with the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), through a mutual agreement, in responding to the soil and water management needs of Santa Cruz County land users. The Resource Conservation District and NRCS relationship was created through the Soil Conservation Act of 1935. Districts were to be led by an elected board. The purposes of the Districts were to advocate soil and water conservation, to sponsor the federal partner NRCS at the local level, to enter into cooperative conservation agreements with landowners, and to advise NRCS on what conservation work needed to be done at the local level. Thus, the conservation partnership was born.*

**The History of the District in Santa Cruz County.**

*Resource Conservation Districts have had a presence in Santa Cruz County since 1941, when the Pajaro RCD was formed in South County. Later, in 1948, the Redwood RCD was formed to serve the central portion of the County. As the County began to grow in population and development began to encroach on more mountainous and sensitive land, the need arose to address the resource issues beyond the then boundaries of the two Districts. In 1978, the Directors of the Districts petitioned the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) to extend the District boundaries countywide, excluding the territories of the four incorporated cities. This new District was named the Santa Cruz County Resource Conservation District with a service of over 260,000 acres. The City of Capitola was subsequently annexed to the District in 1983, at the City's request.*

**Partners in Restoration - Santa Cruz Countywide Permit Coordination Program (PIR)**

The Santa Cruz County Partners in Restoration (PIR) Permit Coordination Program is an exciting new program designed to assist project proponents with natural resource restoration projects in Santa Cruz County by greatly simplifying the permit process. Funding for development of the program came from the California Coastal Conservancy, the NRCS and the Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County. With this, the RCD and the NRCS worked with Sustainable Conservation, a non-profit environmental organization, to bring the program from start-up through negotiations of permit conditions with the regulatory agencies to submittal to them of five of the six required permit applications. This was the principal accomplishment of 2003.

Participants from the regulatory agencies have been increasingly enthusiastic about and more interested in the project as we move forward to develop the countywide program. The County of Santa Cruz, e.g., will issue a Master Permit providing program authorization covering multiple County regulations: Grading, Erosion Control, Riparian Corridor and Wetlands Protection, Sensitive Habitat Protection, Significant Trees Protection, Native American Cultural Sites Protection, and the California Coastal Zone Regulations contained in the Local Coastal Program adopted as part of the County Code. This new approach has been supported by the County Board of Supervisors.

The Santa Cruz County RCD is a special district organized under state law, with no enforcement or regulatory functions. The RCD works closely with groups and individuals to provide practical solutions for soil and water management problems. Our only interaction with regulation is to be of assistance to landowners in complying with them.



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