

**Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County**  
***Strategic Direction***

*Adopted by the RCDSCC Board May 13, 2020*



**RESOURCE**  
**CONSERVATION DISTRICT**  
**OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY**

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Lisa Lurie, Executive Director

Erin McCarthy, Program Specialist

Arianne Rettinger, Grants Manager

Gerry Spinelli, Program Specialist

*Developed with support from Solid Ground Consulting and funding from the Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County*

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## Our Mission

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The mission of the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County is to inspire and assist the people and communities of Santa Cruz County to protect, conserve, and restore our natural resources.

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## Our Vision

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***At the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County, we envision our county as a place where natural resources and the communities and economies that depend upon them are thriving and resilient.***

We believe protecting natural resources meets the needs of people, the community, and the environment—for water, food, clean air, connection, and a diversity of landscapes that are necessary for all life to thrive.

***Ecosystem health and its connection to a thriving community is demonstrated by:***

- A community where all residents, landowners, land users and leaders understand and are empowered to contribute to the stewardship of natural resources;
- Healthy, productive watersheds and lands;
- The recovery and flourishing of native wildlife and plants;
- Plentiful clean water; and
- Natural and human systems that are resilient to climate change.

***The Resource Conservation District is a valuable and reliable partner dedicated to helping our community realize this vision and achieve results. We strive to serve as:***

- **A go-to resource for land stewardship and natural resource issues in Santa Cruz County.** Our skilled and passionate staff members and board of directors offer science-based assistance and education to support our community in learning about and caring for our natural environment. Our expertise centers on stewardship in agriculture and watershed restoration and management. Our core program areas are water management, land & soil stewardship, habitat restoration & species recovery, forest health & fire resiliency, multi-objective planning, and regulatory assistance.
- **A nimble, collaborative partner and a hub of creative problem solving.** We strive to be known and trusted by leaders, landowners, land users, farmers, residents, and cooperating organizations throughout the county. We serve as a connector and a bridge, understanding diverse perspectives and goals and bringing people together to collaborate, build trust, and develop solutions that benefit all. We focus on action on-the-ground, helping to remove barriers to conservation and staying ready to act to meet the changing needs of our community.
- **A stable, sustainably funded organization.** We strive to secure stable and ongoing funding as a result of being a valuable and reliable partner that gets results. Stable funding enables the RCD to fulfill its vital role with consistency and quality. We will work with our allies, partners, and supporters to secure the financial resources needed to achieve our goals.

- **A place of fun and celebration.** We are a dedicated team who are having fun changing the world! We celebrate our successes, reflect on our experiences and support each other to learn, grow, and live our mission.

## 2020-2024 Goals and Strategies

<b>Goal #1: The RCD implements effective watershed health programs to promote ecosystems that are thriving and resilient to climate change.</b>	
<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Potential Outcomes</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Work with partners to implement a watershed-based approach to water management.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1. Utilize the Integrated Watershed Restoration Program (IWRP) to identify, prioritize, and implement watershed restoration and protection actions on public and private lands.</li> <li>1.2. Review and update existing watershed plans.</li> <li>1.3. Participate in regional urban stormwater management planning efforts to identify and advance projects.</li> <li>1.4. Participate in Integrated Regional Water Management Program to incorporate watershed restoration efforts in water management projects (supply, flood mitigation, etc.)</li> <li>1.5. Implement watershed-based planning and action strategies (including but not limited to the following activities: rural road erosion control, stormwater management, home drainage, water use efficiency, etc.)</li> <li>1.6. Partner with Groundwater Sustainability Agencies and landowners to develop and implement local solutions for sustaining groundwater supplies, including managed aquifer recharge, water use efficiency, etc.</li> <li>1.7. Conduct watershed education and outreach to private landowners and land users to encourage watershed stewardship.</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Work with partners to develop and implement a countywide ecological restoration and stewardship program for species recovery.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1. Utilize the Integrated Watershed Restoration Program (IWRP) to identify, prioritize, and implement watershed restoration and protection actions on public and private lands.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Watershed and regional conservation plans are updated/created and include metrics to guide actions.</li> <li>■ Data for water quality, water quantity, and habitat parameters show trends of improvement.</li> <li>■ Focal species are down listed.</li> <li>■ A multi-objective approach to forest health and fire resiliency is well defined and guiding projects of the RCD and our partners.</li> <li>■ Climate resiliency is integrated into RCD programs and projects.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>2.2. Review and update existing and/or develop local recovery and watershed plans for habitat restoration, enhancement and creation.</li><li>2.3. Conduct education and outreach to private landowners and land users to encourage species recovery actions.</li><li>2.4. Coordinate with local, state and federal partners to modify regulations and ordinances to encourage landowner actions to support species on their property.</li><li>3. Work with partners to develop and implement a pro-active forest health and fire resiliency program bringing a multi-objective approach.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>3.1. Participate in regional forest health planning and project prioritization.</li><li>3.2. Support the countywide firesafe council in their mission to educate and mobilize the people of Santa Cruz County to protect their community, homes, and environment from wildfire.</li><li>3.3. Implement small and large scale forest health and fire resiliency projects.</li></ul></li><li>4. Work with partners to identify and reduce barriers to implementation of conservation projects on private lands.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>4.1. Utilize and promote the Partners in Restoration permit coordination program to improve the ease of permitting conservation projects.</li><li>4.2. Understand and work to reduce where possible landowner liability related to conservation project implementation.</li></ul></li><li>5. Work with partners to develop new and updated conservation approaches at a regional scale and within Santa Cruz County.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>5.1. Build on existing processes to support and implement advanced mitigation planning.</li><li>5.2. Identify additional mechanisms to facilitate large scale, high impact projects.</li></ul></li><li>6. Evaluate RCD programs to ensure climate resiliency is addressed.</li></ul>	
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**Goal #2: Conservation actions on agricultural working lands support the environmental health and economic drivers of Santa Cruz County to be viable and resilient to climate change.**

<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Potential Outcomes</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Partner with Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) and growers to develop and implement local solutions for sustaining groundwater supplies, including managed aquifer recharge, irrigation efficiency, covered fallow, and soil health.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1. Partner with the Pajaro Basin GSA to reduce groundwater overdraft with three additional Managed Aquifer Recharge (MAR) basins in the Pajaro Basin.</li> <li>1.2. Incorporate additional MAR into the Pajaro Valley Basin Management Plan.</li> <li>1.3. Coordinate partners to address water rights aspects of MAR.</li> <li>1.4. Inform GSAs on diverse practices to improve water use on farms (such as covered fallow, soil health).</li> <li>1.5. Continue to engage with partners on desired incentives and strategies to implement incentives.</li> <li>1.6. Share successes and lessons learned from the Pajaro Valley with other GSA’s within the District and across the state.</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Provide sustained on-farm technical assistance for improving water quality, water supply, and soil health, including:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1. Irrigation and nutrient management,</li> <li>2.2. Soil erosion control and winter cover crop, and</li> <li>2.3. Carbon farm planning to implement on-farm practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and maximize carbon sequestration on farms.</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Establish monitoring programs to evaluate progress.</li> <li>4. Support grower compliance with environmental regulations (including record keeping, conservation planning, best management practice implementation, and third-party collaborative alternative approaches).               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4.1. Engage with partners to explore cooperative compliance models.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ MAR projects contribute an additional 700 acre-feet per year of aquifer recharge.</li> <li>■ Pajaro Valley basin-wide data show a decreasing trend in agricultural water use.</li> <li>■ 20 farms are actively implementing soil management practices that augment soil carbon.</li> <li>■ Water quality monitoring data show improving trends.</li> <li>■ Participation in RCD ag technical assistance programs is increasing.</li> </ul>

<p>4.2. Work with regulatory and agencies and the community to promote practices that are workable and effective.</p> <p>5. Provide outreach to growers to connect with technical and financial assistance.</p>	
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<b>Goal #3: Community members understand and participate in RCD efforts in Santa Cruz County</b>	
<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Potential Outcomes</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Understand community needs and priorities.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1. Meet with partners to understand their needs and their constituents’ needs and potential alignment with the RCD.</li> <li>1.2. Convene at least one community meeting each year.</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Improve the ease of access and participation in RCD programs by the broader community.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1. Identify and reach out to new partners, community members, and agencies who have not worked with the RCD in the past.</li> <li>2.2. Nurture priority partnerships including building relationships with equity and social justice organizations and understanding where alignment exists.</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Develop systems and tools for effectively communicating about the RCD and its work.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.1. Gather information about the RCD’s successes.</li> <li>3.2. Develop and implement a communications plan for the RCD, including key messages by audience.</li> <li>3.3. Train all staff and board to use key messages.</li> <li>3.4. Increase staff capacity in marketing and communications.</li> <li>3.5. Develop printed and electronic promotional and education materials and branded RCD gear to support consistent RCD communications.</li> <li>3.6. Use digital communications, video, and social media to promote the RCD’s programs and messages.</li> <li>3.7. Be present and visible at community events and activities that align with our strategic goals</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Target audiences (as defined in the RCD’s communications plan) have high awareness of the RCD and our work.</li> <li>▪ Participation in RCD programs reflects the diversity of our community.</li> <li>▪ We develop new partners that view the RCD as a trusted, sought-after partner.</li> </ul>

<b>Goal #4: Stable and sufficient revenue allows the RCD to advance its mission and vision.</b>	
<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Potential Outcomes</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Recover full costs of program implementation.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1. Develop an updated cost allocation plan for the RCD.</li> <li>1.2. Inform funders to improve funding programs to fully cover indirect costs, reduce administrative costs, create more sustained programmatic funding, and provide baseline funding.</li> <li>1.3. Continue to keep RCD indirect costs in line with OMB principles</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Seek capacity building funds to develop a full business plan / revenue plan for the RCD.</li> <li>3. Investigate and pursue new, diverse funding sources.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.1. Research funding models of other RCDs.</li> <li>3.2. Research and analyze funder/partner needs and strategic alignment (local agencies, foundation and individual funders, landowners and ag innovators).</li> <li>3.3. Research new fundraising mechanisms including the potential of developing a 501c3 support organization.</li> <li>3.4. Research passive income opportunities.</li> <li>3.5. Continue to explore opportunities for a local funding measure to support bundled services (water quality, fire resiliency, stormwater, etc.).</li> <li>3.6. Diversify funding to provide on-the-ground services without creating excessive administrative burden.</li> <li>3.7. Explore opportunities to bring cities and city funding into the District.</li> <li>3.8. Increase applications for private foundation grants.</li> <li>3.9. Develop a plan to seek funding from major donors.</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. Develop stronger relationships with local agencies including County Departments to advocate for increased support for work that aligns with their priorities.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The RCD prioritizes grants that fully cover indirect operating costs.</li> <li>▪ By 2024, 20% of the RCD’s personnel budget is unrestricted and supports external and internal planning, professional development, and program evaluation.</li> <li>▪ The RCD’s core programs are sustained over time.</li> <li>▪ The RCD will implement one visible, revenue generating project.</li> <li>▪ The fund source to staff ratio will decrease (i.e. we will seek and secure larger grants).</li> <li>▪ The RCD will have sufficient funds to maintain staff pay on par with a competitive job market.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>5. Identify and pro-actively fund core emergency response services (such as stormwater management, fire preparedness, post fire recovery, and drought response) that the RCD needs to maintain and offer to the community for immediate response to natural disasters.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>5.1. Develop a funding emergency plan – how to maintain core functions in times of funding drought.</li></ul></li><li>6. Investigate expanding fee-for-service programs.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>6.1. Operationalize the In-Lieu Fee Mitigation program.</li><li>6.2. Research competitive pricing for potential fee for service opportunities.</li><li>6.3. Develop business plans for services to ag innovators and landowners.</li></ul></li><li>7. Pursue funding opportunities based on a cost-benefit analysis with an aim to achieve more efficient administration.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>7.1. Pursue fewer, larger grants</li></ul></li></ul>	
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<b>Goal #5: The RCD Board of Directors and staff have the capacity, tools, and culture needed to implement the strategic plan goals.</b>	
<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Potential Outcomes</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Enable a skilled and engaged Board of Directors.                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1. Use board meetings efficiently by engaging in strategic discussion and going deep on topics that take advantage of the collective experience and diverse perspectives of the board to provide staff with thought-partnership that enhances their work.</li> <li>1.2. Regularly inform the board of the work of the RCD staff.</li> <li>1.3. Engage the board in outreach as ambassadors to key stakeholders and potential funders.</li> <li>1.4. Identify and recruit Directors and Associate Directors with key skills, connections, and demographics that align with our strategic goals and reflect the various perspectives within the community.</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Continue to hire and retain a highly skilled professional staff.                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1. Secure funding for professional development for staff.</li> <li>2.2. Refine RCD staff structure to streamline operations.</li> <li>2.3. Implement an effective performance review process that evaluates and encourages staff progress relative to individual and strategic plan goals.</li> <li>2.4. Ensure competitive pay and recognition of staff achievements.</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Enable a cohesive and productive organizational culture.                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.1. Seek unrestricted funding to enable time for planning, reflection, and evaluation.</li> <li>3.2. Celebrate successes.</li> <li>3.3. Continue to encourage innovation and creativity.</li> <li>3.4. Encourage collaboration across RCD programs.</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. Create an RCD that is welcoming, inclusive, and diverse.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Board is active and engaged as ambassadors, advocates and strategic thought partners for the RCD.</li> <li>▪ RCD staff feel supported, valued, and satisfied in their work.</li> <li>▪ The board and staff of the RCD reflect the diversity of our community.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>4.1. Provide training to board and staff on becoming a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization.</li><li>4.2. Update the RCD's policies as needed.</li><li>4.3. Learn and follow best practices for recruitment of a diverse staff and board.</li><li>4.4. Maintain an intentional culture that supports all members of the team to achieve their best.</li></ul>	
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