

ANNUAL REPORT

Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County



2017



**RESOURCE
CONSERVATION
DISTRICT**

Greater San Diego County
www.rcdsandiego.org

A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

2017 was a very productive year for our RCD and a year for breakthroughs in areas we have not reached before and/or have been trying to make progress in for years. Our tree mortality issues with the borer beetles has advanced significantly. Through our collaborative efforts with other agencies and the California Invasive Species Council and their advisory committee, we put on a very successful Invasive Species summit at the Capitol this January and assisted in two pending legislative bills for 2018 to provide funding for treating this problem. We also have worked diligently on legislation for fire prevention work and anticipate success in much needed funding for our fire programs — not only in San Diego, but in all of California. Our legislative push has also begun a collaboration with Inland Empire RCD to have RCDs, San Diego, and Southern California on the legislative radar and map as well.

We have also expanded our local presence. Our new partnerships with the San Diego River Conservancy and the Carbon Cycle Institute has provided our Board of Supervisors and community with guidance and information pertinent to San Diego and its **future. During last summer's Hep A outbreak**, we were commissioned by the San Diego River Conservancy to write a white paper on the effects of Hep A on soil and water. Dr. Chandra Richards, one of our new employees, provided her research in a meeting between Supervisor Dianne Jacob, San Diego County Health, and the River Conservancy leading to the development of a collaborative effort between agencies to address this issue. Dr. Richards also wrote San Diego and Southern California's first **Carbon Farm Plan**, which is

allowing us to develop a solid presence in resource conservation practices imperative to the future.

I am also proud to say that at this year's California Association of Resource Conservation District's annual conference, I received the Employee of the Year Award. This is the highest honor in our Association and reflects the efforts of all the staff, their hard work, and significant contributions to our organization and community. I am blessed to have them — as well as a great Board of Directors — as each one of them has contributed to this award as well. I am impressed at what our RCD has done this year, and I hope you are too.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sheryl Hand". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

2017 BY THE NUMBERS

- \$195,650,000** | In property value protected from wildfire risk
- 70,000** | Visitors to the pollinator habitat at San Diego County Fair
- 30,295** | Hours of in-kind volunteer fire prevention services
- 6,153** | Acres of brush cleared to improve fire resilience
- 2,400** | Plants given away to support 200 school gardens
- 2,169** | Students educated about caring for our watershed
- 455** | Homes protected from fire risk
- 300** | Volunteers at three community clean up days at the Tijuana River Valley Community Garden
- 150** | Subscribers receive Fire Safety Newsletter: The Responder
- 134** | Residents attended six day-long fire safety workshops
- 84** | Watershed education presentations given at 21 schools
- 78** | Elderly & disabled residents' homes cleared of dangerous fire fuel
- 72** | Garden plots added to the Tijuana River Valley Community Garden
- 38** | Community Fire Safe Councils supported
- 27** | Active Community Wildfire Protection Plans
- 21** | Grants managed throughout 2017
- 12** | Years of Fire Safe Council Volunteer Awards
- 6** | Quarter-acre plots added to Tijuana River Valley Community Garden
- 6** | Technical workshops delivered for Healthy Soil & Manure Management Grants
- 5** | Conservation Scholarships awarded to high school seniors
- 5** | Fire Safe Council meetings held
- 4** | New RCD staff members added
- 2** | School Garden newsletters sent
- 1** | Carbon Farming Plan written – the first in Southern California
- 1** | Range Camp sponsorship awarded
- 1** | Clean and healthy independent financial audit

ABOUT US



OUR MISSION

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

Protecting, conserving, and restoring natural resources across 1.8 million acres, the Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County (RCDGSDC) is a non-regulatory Special District organized under Division 9 of the California State Public Resources code.

The RCD administers programs to restore and protect San Diego County watersheds, prevent wildfire damage through education and fuel reduction, promote nutrition and stewardship through sustainable agriculture, and revitalize pollinator habitats. As stewards of the regional environment, we partner with a diverse group of landowners, public and private institutions, and concerned citizens to address the diverse conservation and environmental concerns that are unique to San Diego County.

Our District

The RCD's boundaries encompass a service area of

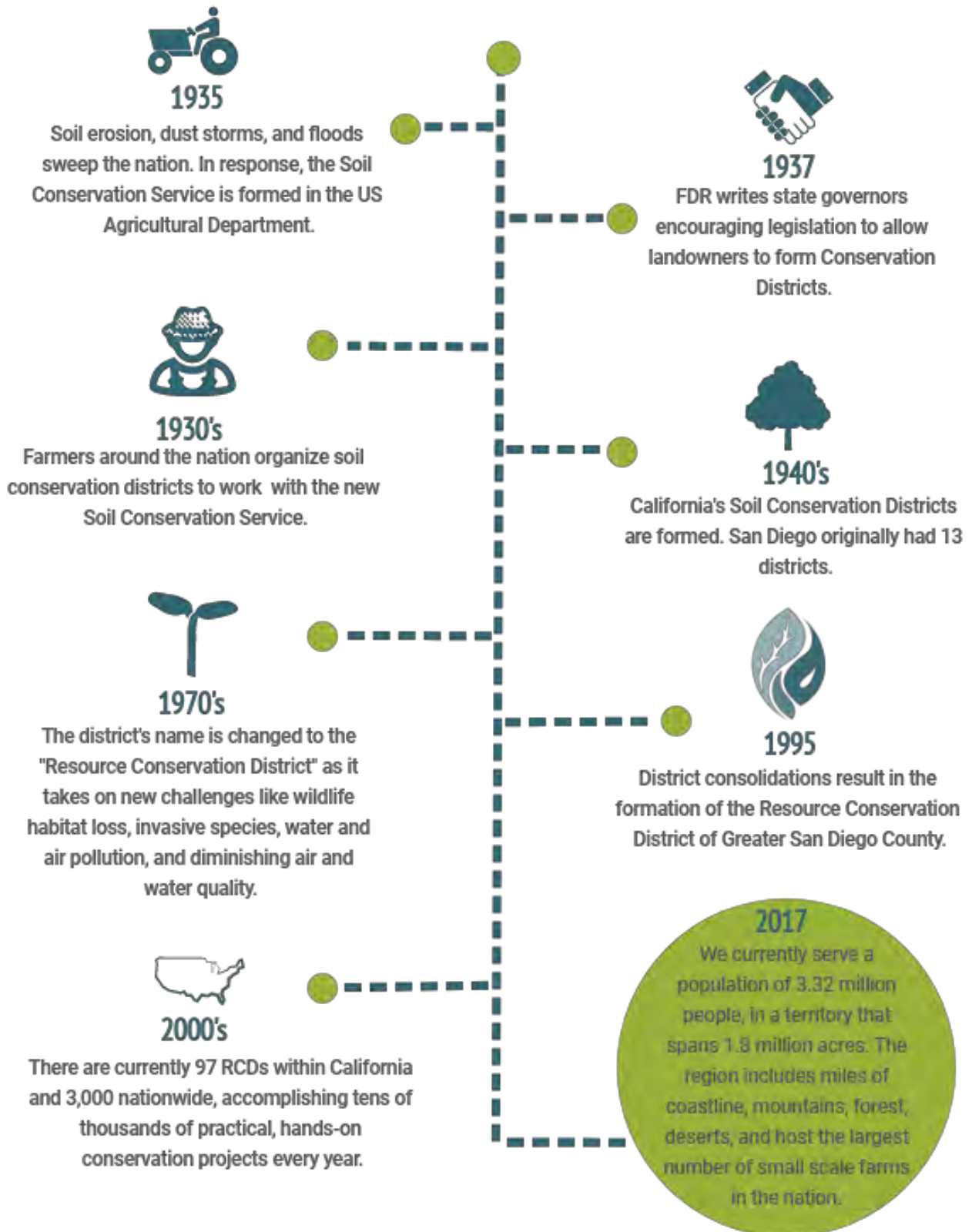
approximately 2,886 square miles or 1,847,300 acres. The District's northern boundary extends into the Bonsal community, the southern boundary extends to the United States-Mexico border, the western boundary extends to the Pacific Ocean and the eastern boundary extends to the Imperial County line.

The highly varied topography of this service area consists of more than thirty types of vegetative communities and encompasses mountains, deserts, forest, and coastal resources, including ten varied and distinct watersheds with streams, rivers, sloughs, lakes, beaches, and bays, as well as urban, agricultural, and suburban areas.

The population of San Diego County is dense with 3.3 million people and includes the largest amount of small farms (6,687) in America. It is also the 5th highest populated county and the 19th largest agricultural economy in the U.S.



OUR HISTORY — 1940s TO TODAY



FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS



As a local governmental entity, the RCD is tax-exempt under IRS rules. We conduct annual financial audits by an independent auditing firm. Our most recent audit was conducted by Wilkinson Hadley King & Co. LLP. It covers fiscal year 2015 – 2016 and is available to view in full on our company website. The audit shows the RCD to be solvent and stable.

District programs, projects, and services are primarily funded by local, state, and federal grants and donations. In addition, we receive income in the form of lease rentals from the Tijuana River Valley Community Garden, which we manage. The RCD receives annual tax apportionment funds in the amount of 1% of unimproved properties (assessed land values only).

RCD 2017 FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Total net assets of the district for 2017	\$2,669,517
Net assets not invested in buildings, land or equipment (i.e. unrestricted assets)	\$1,667,904
Total tax assessment dollars deposited to the District	\$317,841
Projected operating budget 2015-2016	\$700,136
Projected operating budget 2016-2017	\$1,154,158

THE TIJUANA RIVER VALLEY COMMUNITY GARDEN

2017 was a year of growth at the community garden. Our expansion project got underway in March, and by

the summer new gardeners were working their plots. Nearly all the seventy two new plots have been filled, giving us a total of 200.



New Garden Signage

Our garden waiting list is down from over 170 to just a few. We are excited that the expansion has helped to meet the community's need for more access to land for gardening, and grateful for support from the County Board of Supervisors and the NACD for making this project a reality. As part of our expansion, we

created six, quarter-acre plots reserved for residents interested in growing produce on a larger scale, with the potential to sell to local



Gardeners come from all cultures & walks of life

farmers' markets, restaurants, etc.

With grants from NACD and CARCD, we held eleven workshops for gardeners and local residents, with topics including garden design, irrigation, composting, zero-waste cooking and preserving, edible garden weeds, cover cropping, and healthy, organic soil building practices.

Our community events were also a big success this year. We held three community clean-up days: one in April as a part of the county-wide Creek to Bay Clean-up, a July clean-up day and gardener potluck, and a third event in September as a part of the International Coastal Clean-up Day. Over 300 people participated in beautifying the garden at these events.

In addition, we held the 3rd Annual **Soil Shindig** in partnership with our neighbor, Wild Willow Farm and Education Center, with activities taking place at both sites. This



Volunteers at the "Soil Shindig"

year's event included ten workshops and demonstrations, two guided trail walks, kids' activities, horse and carriage rides, information booths, a keynote panel, and a food truck! We are grateful to the County Supervisors and all our partners for their support of this event.

We continue to collaborate with the Global TIES Program (Teams in Engineering Service) at UCSD. This program gives teams of engineering students the opportunity to apply their skills in working on a project for a non-profit client. This year, students designed a solar-powered lighting and security camera system for the storage container at the garden.

MANY THANKS

To our garden partner:
San Diego County Department
of Parks and Recreation

FIRE SAFE COUNCIL OF SAN DIEGO COUNTY



- ▶ **\$195,650,000** In property value protected from wildfire risk
- ▶ **30,295** Hours of in-kind volunteer fire prevention services
- ▶ **6,153** Acres of brush cleared to improve fire resilience

The ever-present threat of wildfire in San Diego County is a huge concern and top priority of the RCD, as we manage the programs and grants of the Fire Safe Council of San Diego County (FSCSDC). In 2017, California wildfires caused historic levels of death and destruction, erupting as far north at the Oregon border and as far south as San Diego.

The Fire Safe Council of San Diego County acts as the umbrella organization for thirty-eight community Fire Safe Councils throughout our district. We support those local Fire Safe Councils by holding bi-monthly meetings, providing guidance on the preparation and maintenance of Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs), and delivering fire-safety workshops.

We further support residents of these communities with programs such as no-cost chipping and defensible space assistance. Our programs are so successful that we have consistently received additional discretionary funds from partner organizations to support our work.

Meetings & Community Outreach:

- Meetings are held every other month, bringing together approximately 50 community members, as well as local, state, and federal fire agency officials.
- A great forum for sharing news and information, meetings feature speakers and

workshops addressing the latest practices in fire safety, prevention, and legislation.

- In 2017, we launched The Responder newsletter, which features fire safety articles and informative links to help residents prepare their properties for wildfire.

No-Cost Chipping & Defensible Space Assistance Programs:

- Funded through grants from various sources, including state & federal agencies, local foundations, and corporate donations.
- The Fire Safe Council of San Diego County helps homeowners create defensible space on their property for added fire safety.

Fire Safety Workshops:

- The FSCSDC facilitates a day-long fire behavior workshop called Fire Operations in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).
- In 2017, workshops were taught in Warner Springs, Fallbrook, Palomar, Valley Center, Descanso, and Chula Vista, reaching 134 community members.

Annual Fire Safe Council Volunteer Awards:

- 2017 was our twelfth year of honoring the exceptional volunteers whose fire prevention efforts keep their communities fire safe.
- Six awards given to outstanding Fire Safe Councils and their volunteers.

CARBON FARMING



"To forget how to dig the earth and to tend the soil is to forget ourselves."

Mahatma Gandhi

In 2017, the RCD significantly expanded its role to support carbon farming – a suite of agricultural practices that sequester carbon from greenhouse gases into soil and vegetation. Through conference calls, workshops, and events, we advanced our organization’s knowledge of healthy soils and climate smart approaches. At each event, we learned about the co-benefits of healthy soils, intensive grazing managements, and climate-beneficial agricultural methods as they relate to farm productivity and resilience. Moreover, we collaborate with partners in San Diego County to contribute to the ongoing climate change work being performed by other RCDs across the state. Through grant funding from the Jena and Michael King Foundation and the Department of Conservation, the RCD developed the first carbon farm plan in Southern California. This conservation assessment plan highlighted how carbon farming practices

could significantly decrease carbon emissions and increase soil carbon, while providing multiple farm co-benefits for a 3,100-acre ranch operation.

The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) awarded the RCD a Healthy Soils Program (HSP) Demonstration Project Grant to showcase carbon-beneficial practices to California farmers and ranchers at the Tijuana River Valley Community Garden. **Patagonia’s Retail Grants Program** also awarded the RCD with funding for carbon farming implementation, while building school and community involvement and partnership with local environmental groups. Through another **grant from CDFA’s HSP Incentives Program**, the RCD also offered technical assistance and grant application support to local farmers interested in implementing carbon farming practices on their land to boost farm productivity and/or improve their agritourism operation.

POLLINATOR SUPPORT & MILKWEED FOR MONARCHS

This year, we have strengthened and formalized our partnerships around pollinator habitat and protection by creating the [San Diego Pollinator Alliance](#).



Through this Alliance, we are working collaboratively with seven other agencies and organizations to raise awareness among local residents about the importance of pollinators, and how to support them by creating pollinator habitat at home.



Photo by Lisa Cox / U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

A large part of our outreach effort includes the demonstration native pollinator habitat at the San Diego County Fair. The aim of our exhibit is to raise awareness of the im-

portance of pollinators and how individuals can support pollinators by creating habitat using native plants. This year, the pollinator garden was expanded to include more planted areas, additional water conservation features, and new interpretive signage. We collaborated with Pollinator Alliance members to train volunteer docents and complete the expansion work. We estimate that around 70,000 visited the pollinator area at the fair this year.

In addition to this outreach effort, we continue to donate narrowleaf milkweed (a variety native to Southern California) and native wildflower seed mix with schools and the general



Photo by Lisa Cox / U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

public through our [Milkweed for Monarchs Program](#). We share the importance of pollinators to schools, clubs, and scout groups through presentations upon request.

“Pollinators are responsible for 1 in every 3 bites of food we eat, and they also help sustain plant diversity – without them, our world would be a much duller place!”

SCHOOL GARDEN SUPPORT

The RCD continued its partnership with the [San Diego County School Garden Collaborative](#) in 2017 to provide support to schools in developing and using their school gardens. As a part of this work, we delivered three professional development sessions for elementary school teachers in the Clairemont area on how to maintain a garden and the myriad ways of linking it to the curriculum.

Our [Annual Plant Giveaway](#), generously supported by Altman Plants in Vista, was held on March 9, 2017. Nearly 2,400 vegetable and herb seedlings were given to 200 participants at five distribution sites across the County.

The RCD continues to distribute our [Email Newsletter](#) to teachers and other garden contacts across the county to share information about training, resources, funding op-

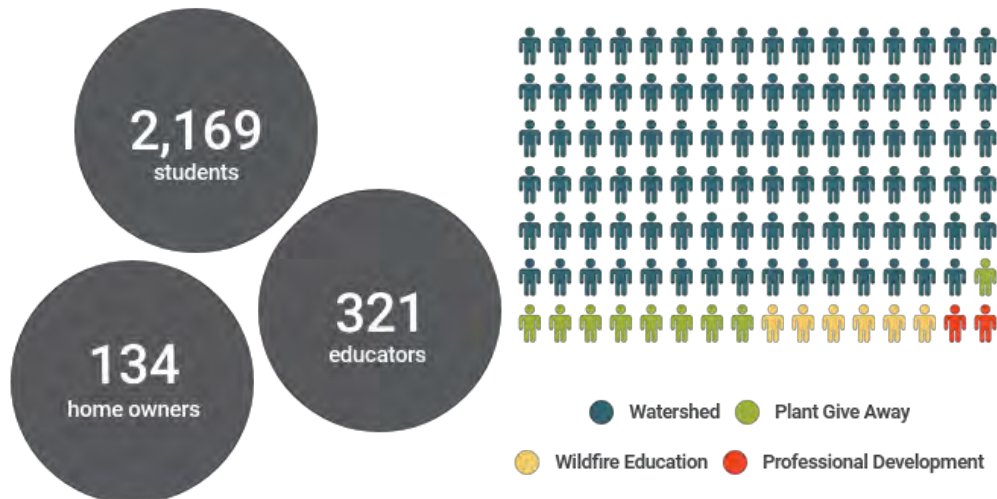
portunities, and other items of interest to school gardens.



Teachers pick up free plants for their school's garden

Education is a key component to many RCD Programs. Educating teachers, students, and landowners is the foundation of our mission.

2017 Impact of Education Programs



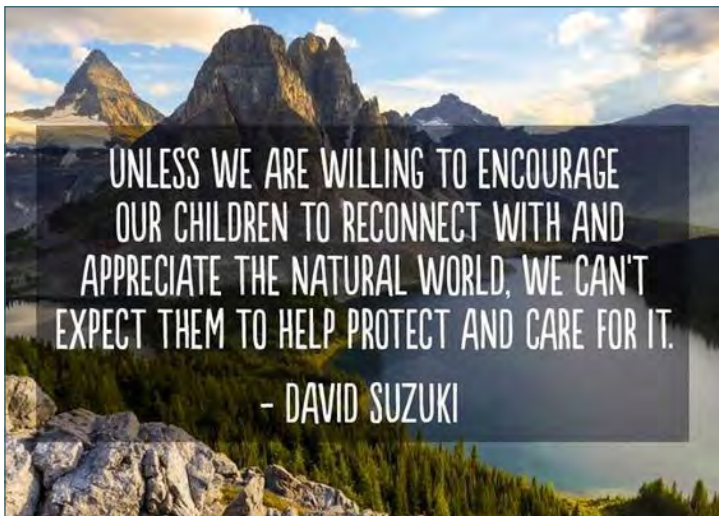
WATERSHED EDUCATION PROGRAM

For over twenty years the RCD has partnered with the Unified Port of San Diego to deliver watershed education programs



to schools located in the San Diego Bay Watershed. This year marked the beginning of a new five-year term to continue these efforts and collaboration.

The RCD's **Watershed Connection** program introduces students to important water quality issues in San Diego County including the concept of a watershed – how the watershed system becomes polluted and what we as individuals can do to make a difference. Students learn about common



2017 Highlights:

2,035 students reached

21 schools participated

76 presentations delivered

non-point source pollutants and the effects they have on San Diego waterways and marine life. In 2017, the program reached 2,035 second, fifth, and sixth grade students through seventy-six presentations at twenty-one schools within the San Diego Bay Watershed.



Students explore a watershed model for hands-on learning

Program effectiveness is measured by student knowledge gained during program participation. To gauge effectiveness, students complete a pre- and post-presentation assessment, and those scores are compared to see how effective our presentations are. During the academic year of 2017 we saw an increase in student test scores amongst all participating classes. In addition, 96% of participating educators who completed a post-program survey reported the watershed lesson to be "excellent."

See the next page to hear what students and teachers have to say about our program.

STUDENTS & TEACHERS SPEAK OUT

Watershed education remains one of the RCD's longest running programs, with over 20 years of successful operation!

"I learned how important it is to take care of the ocean." - Vincent S.

"I learned that the water that goes to the ocean is important!"
-Madison C.

"One important thing I learned from the Watershed Education Program is that pollution effects everybody's life."
- Erika R.

"I learned that all chemicals, trash, and a lot of bad things can go into the storm drains and into the water where animals can get sick." -Ivan R.


"One new thing that I learned is all of the nonpoint source pollutants are a huge problem, and humans need to stop polluting." - Melissa O.

"Presenter was engaging and respectful of all students." - Ira Harbison Elementary, 6th grade educator

"I learned that pollution can come from many places and that the littlest things that can be picked up will help." - Elena V.

"Love this program! Thank you!" -Mt. Vernon Elementary, 2nd grade educator

"I appreciate the presenter's tone and thoughtfulness when addressing student questions. I also appreciate the hands-on interaction." - Valle Lindo Elementary, 2nd grade educator



SUPPORTING HIGH SCHOOL CONSERVATIONISTS

For the past twenty-nine years, the RCD has awarded Scholarships to conservation-minded high school seniors who are pursuing further education in the fields of resource conservation, environmental sciences, or agriculture. In 2017, we awarded five \$1,000 scholarships to students from various high schools



throughout San Diego County. The **RCD Conservation Scholarships** are not strictly academic scholarships, but also take into account **the applicant's original essay, relevant work and volunteer experience, and letters of recommendation.**

The twenty-three applications we received exemplified the high-level of commitment and community engagement these students exhibited. **"It makes us proud to support these deserving students who have already accomplished a great deal in their lives,"** says Sheryl Landrum, RCD Executive Director. **"From volunteering and participating in high school environmental and farming clubs to taking college-level, AP, and honors courses – often while holding down part-time jobs – they are driven and committed to making a difference."**

In addition to our scholarship program, every year the RCD sponsors one or more students

to attend the California Society of Range Management's summer **"Range Camp."** In 2017, we sent one student from our district and facilitated another student's trip who was sponsored by the Southern California Baja Region of RCD's. **At Range Camp, students have a**

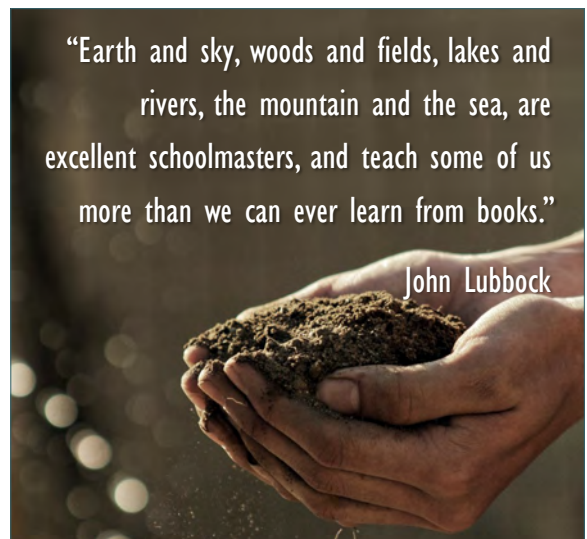
unique, hands-on opportunity to shadow university and career professionals for a week to learn about the science and management of our natural resources.

All our high school programs are designed to help students learn about resource conservation, environmental sciences, and agriculture, with the goal of creating life-long stewards of our environment. In 2018, we plan to expand our support of high school students with a **Speak-Off Competition** and an environmental education program, called SLEWS (Student & Landowner Education and Watershed Stewardship). Our **SLEWS Program** will coincide with

discretionary funds given by San Diego Gas & Electric for supporting Environmental Champions within the underserved areas of San Diego County.

"Earth and sky, woods and fields, lakes and rivers, the mountain and the sea, are excellent schoolmasters, and teach some of us more than we can ever learn from books."

John Lubbock



RESOURCE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION OF GREATER SAN DIEGO



In 2016, we created the Resource Conservation Foundation of Greater San Diego — a 501(c)(3) non-profit — to help us expand the programs and capabilities of the RCD. The Foundation allows us more flexibility in pursuing funding opportunities. Diversifying our funding sources will enable us to better serve our community and to bring greater

conservation benefits to San Diego County.

In 2017, the Foundation received four grants, allowing us to deliver much needed programs and services to San Diego County. These grants helped us to create the first Carbon Farm Plan in San Diego County, as well as engage local high school students in environmental education.



OUR PEOPLE

RCD Board of Directors

Donald Butz, Board President

Marilyn Huntamer, Board Vice President

Nadine Scott, Board Secretary/Treasurer

Kurt Streule, Director

James Thompson, Director

Jordan Gascon, Director

Alexander S. Balkin, Director

D.K. Nasland, Associate Director

Jo MacKenzie, Associate Director

Julia Richards, Associate Director

Cody Petterson, Associate Director

RCD Staff

Sheryl Landrum, Executive Director

Chris Kelley, Accountant

Ann Baldridge, Program Manager

Chandra Richards, Conservation Ecologist

Chris Foran, Development & Communication

Britney Munoz, Community Outreach Specialist
& Fire Safe Council Coordinator

Martina Skjellerudsveen, Agricultural Outreach
Specialist

Vince DiMaggio, Program Assistant

Kyle Merker, Program Assistant

Sierra Reiss, Program Assistant



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