

# 2022 ANNUAL REPORT

**Our Mission:** To protect, conserve, and restore natural resources through education, information, and technical assistance programs.

We are a local governmental special district focused on natural resource conservation. We provide resources and programs on farming, pollinator health, environmental education, and wildfire resilience to engage and empower individuals to protect the land, wildlife, and our communities.



**RESOURCE  
CONSERVATION  
DISTRICT**  
Greater San Diego County



Sea of green at a prescribed grazing demonstration pasture at Rancho Jamul.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |    |  |    |
|---|----|--|----|
| Who We Are & What We Do .....               | 2  | Habitat Restoration .....                                | 19 |
| Our History - 1940's to Today .....         | 3  | Supporting High School Conservationist .....             | 20 |
| Financial Highlights .....                  | 4  | The Watershed Connection .....                           | 22 |
| Community Gardens .....                     | 5  | School Garden Support .....                              | 24 |
| Supporting Farmers and Ranchers .....       | 6  | Pollinator Health .....                                  | 25 |
| Wild Willow Farm & Education .....          | 10 | Resource Conservation Foundation of Greater San Diego .. | 26 |
| Forest Health and Fire Prevention .....     | 13 | Our Funders .....  | 27 |
| Fire Safe Council of San Diego County ..... | 16 | Our People .....   | 28 |

# A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Resource Conservation District friends and partners:

2022 was a busy year and we are excited to share our successes with you! It's been great getting out and about, hosting and attending in-person meetings and events. After a couple of years of Zoom calls, it's been nice to see familiar faces off screen and meet people who've always been a face in a box!

Our programs continued to grow in 2022, and we are proud to be offering some new services. For example, our Agriculture Department received funding for an irrigation audit program for farmers and ranchers and through hiring new staff, we have been able to expand our capacity to offer technical assistance in the field. If you're a farmer or rancher interested in soil testing, irrigation audit, or assistance with conserving natural resources on your land, please contact us!

Our Agriculture Department also spent the year focusing on the San Diego Sustainable Agriculture planning program, an effort to analyze agricultural land and the needs of farmers and ranchers in San Diego County. The project report will be issued in mid-2023.

We were excited to participate in the US Department of State's Young Transatlantic Innovation Leaders Initiative (YTILI) program by hosting a Fellow from Poland. He spent five weeks in our office sharing information about his work to further regenerative agriculture in Europe and learning about the work we do here. Our Agricultural Specialist was able to participate in a reciprocal program and travel to Poland to visit farms, engage in discussions about European agricultural policy, and explore lessons we can learn from each other.

Our Forest Health & Fire Prevention Department also continued to grow in 2022 with the expansion of the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity program. We've developed and strengthened partnerships with many agencies, tribal nations, and other entities engaged in this work that is focused on capacity building, forest health, and collaboration. The Regional Priority Plan being developed through the RFFC program will be published in early 2023, bringing attention to the unique challenges and needs San Diego faces in its efforts to be more resilient in the face of wildfire. The Department also grew by three this year - we hired a Forestry & Fire Prevention Project Manager and brought on two Fellows from the GrizzlyCorps program.

2022 has been an exciting year for our pollinator health work. We rolled out the Working Lands for Pollinators program, supporting more pollinator habitat on farms and ranches and ramped up our outreach efforts to raise awareness about actions we can all take to support pollinators and to get more San Diego Native Milkweed into the community.

We continued to support education on food, farming, and conservation through Wild Willow Farm, our Watershed Education Program, and a new Pollinator Education program. And we hosted a speech competition and our annual scholarship program for local high school students.

The RCDGSDC has a wonderful staff of 20 employees that works incredibly hard to embody our mission to protect, conserve, and restore our natural resources, as well as an active and supportive Board of Directors and a wealth of amazing partners. We are also proud to work with many talented Fellows and interns both in our office and at our farm, who add significant value to our programs. We look forward to another year of collaboration, conservation, and community building in 2023.

Please feel free to reach out to RCDGSDC staff with any questions or to get involved.

Ann Baldrige, RCDGSDC Executive Director

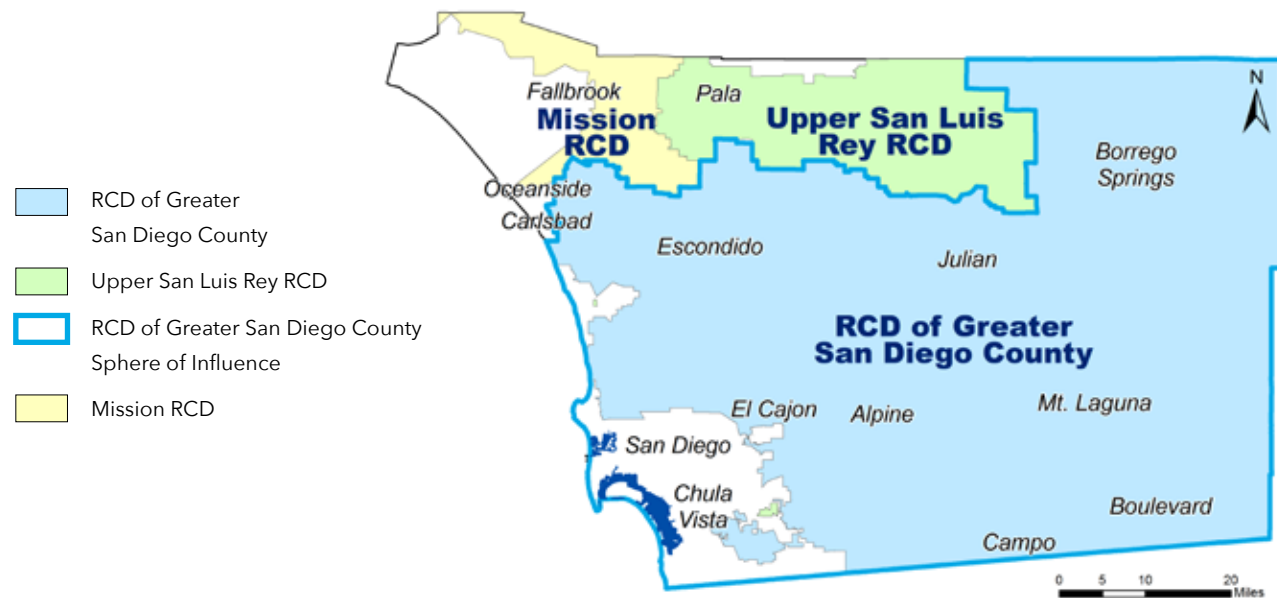
Donald Butz, RCDGSDC Board President

# WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

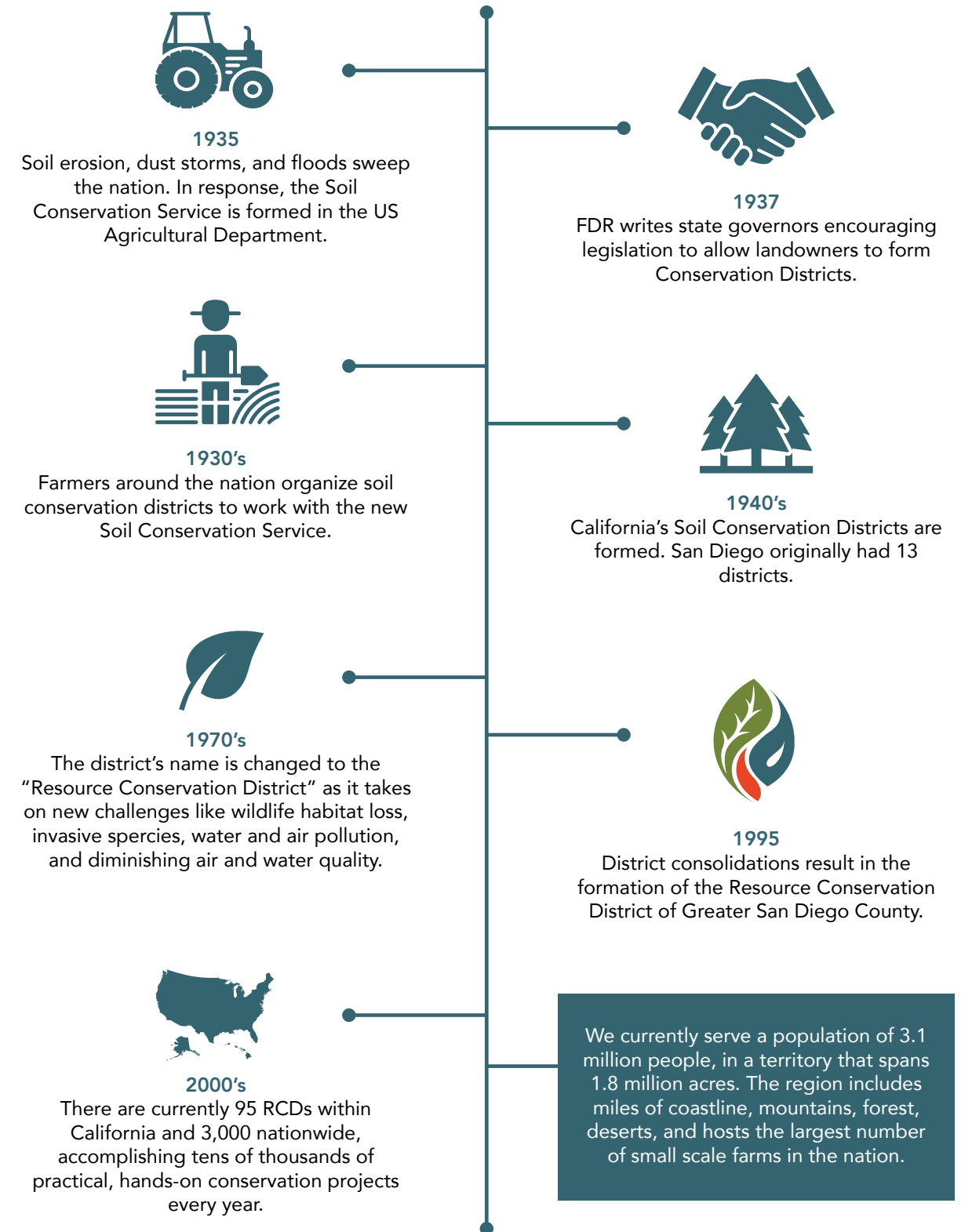
Protecting, conserving, and restoring natural resources across 1.8 million acres, the Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County (RCDGSDC) is a non-regulatory Special District organized under Division 9 of the California State Public Resources Code. The RCDGSDC administers programs to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

- 1,847,300 acres or 2,886 square miles San Diego County
- Population: 3.1 million
- Fifth highest populated county in US
- 19th largest agricultural economy in US
- Largest number of small farms (more than 5,000) in US San Diego County
- San Diego has the largest number of part-time farmers
- Second largest number of farms with women as principal operator
- Adjacent to 18 federally recognized Tribal Nation Reservations
- Topography: San Diego is considered a biodiversity hotspot. It is home to more than 30 vegetation communities as well as hundreds of rare plant and animal species
- Encompasses mountains, deserts, forest, and coastal resources
- Includes 11 watersheds with streams, rivers, sloughs, lakes, beaches and bays, as well as urban, agricultural, and suburban areas



# OUR HISTORY - 1940'S TO TODAY



## Financial Highlights

Our District’s 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 and the Sweetwater Community Garden, and fees from workshops, courses, field trips, and produce sales at Wild Willow Farm, which we manage. The RCDGSDC receives annual tax apportionment funds allocated from the countywide 1% property tax revenue (assessed land values only). We conduct annual financial audits by an independent auditing firm. Our most recent audit, covering fiscal year 2021-2022 was conducted by Wilkinson Hadley King & Co. LLP. This audit and previous audits can be found at our website (<https://www.rcdsandiego.org/district-transparency>). Our audits show the RCDGSDC to be solvent and stable.

**\$6.6M**

At the close of 2022, the RCDGSDC was managing 32 grants, totaling more than \$6,609,000

**\$3.7M**

Total net assets of the district for 2022: \$3,757,115

**\$852K**

Net assets not invested in buildings, land or equipment (i.e. unrestricted assets): \$852,292

**\$401K**

Total tax assessment dollars deposited to the District: \$401,703

**\$1.3M**

Operating budget 2020-21: \$1,322,567

**\$1.1M**

Operating budget 2021-22: \$1,169,355



French Valley, Palomar Mountain, part of our 2019 Cal Fire Forest Health Grant.

## Community Gardens *The Benefits of Fresh Produce, Open Air, and a Vibrant Gardening Community*

For two decades, our community garden, located in the beautiful Tijuana River Valley Regional Park, has been serving the residents of the South Bay, offering them the ability to grow fresh produce for themselves and their families. The Tijuana River Valley Community Garden (TRVCG) is home to 210 plots that are rented to local residents.

The TRVCG is also home to ten quarter acre farm plots. These spaces are for farmers in San Diego County who want to start their own farm business. We currently host Pixca Farm, Grow Eco Farm, and Whited’s Produce, among others. Offering these spaces to small practicing farmers increases access to land, fresh food to the local community, and encourages healthy soil practices.

In 2022, we led two Garden Cleanup days in partnership with I Love a Clean San Diego. These cleanup days engaged 121 gardeners to beautify the community space, pick up trash, and care for communal fruit trees. In the spring, gardeners collected three dumpsters worth of trash and two dumpsters in the fall.

TRVCG’s sister garden is Sweetwater Community Garden in Bonita, established in 2019. The Sweetwater Garden has been steadily growing and gained a total of 58 new gardeners in 2022. This garden is thriving and has nearly reached gardener capacity!

In 2022, the RCDGSDC was awarded a grant from the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) that has opened the door for gardeners to receive extra help in their gardening journey. Because of this grant funding, RCDGSDC staff is now able to provide technical assistance and education to ALL our gardeners on a multitude of subjects including efficient irrigation systems, pest management, soil health, and composting. We expect our gardeners to thrive as they begin to implement the ideas and professional advice provided by RCD staff.



Healthy soil is the foundation to sustainable farms, communities and ecosystems.

### 2022 COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 58 new gardeners received plots at the Sweetwater Garden.
- 24 new gardeners received plots at the Tijuana River Valley Community Garden.
- A total of 402 hours of volunteer time were contributed by the community to garden maintenance, hedgerow upkeep, fruit tree care, and garden improvement.
- Two cleanup days were hosted with I Love a Clean San Diego.
- 67 gardeners participated in the Spring garden cleanup and 54 gardeners participated in the Fall garden cleanup.
- Received a \$49,905 grant from the National Association of Conservation Districts.
- The NACD Grant allowed us to provide 1-1 gardening consultations at both community gardens and 9 free workshops at Wild Willow Farm.
- Special thanks to The Bonita Library for holding Story Time at the Sweetwater Community Garden.

## Supporting Farmers and Ranchers

### Capacity Building for Conservation Practices

In 2022, the Agriculture Department focused on expanding the services offered to local producers and building the capacity of agricultural producers to implement conservation practices. The Ag Department grew this year with the addition of new positions and new programs and worked to collaborate more with other programs at the RCDGSDC through a new Farm to School grant involving Wild Willow and by focusing the Community Gardens as a critical connection between community and commercial agriculture.

We expanded our ability to provide direct services to agricultural producers with additional grant awards totaling approximately \$627,000. The Department is funded for the next three years to provide irrigation evaluations and pump efficiency tests through a grant from the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA). Farm to school activities will now be supported with CDFA funding for increased production at Wild Willow Farm to educate and provide fresh produce to students at Sweetwater Unified High School District. Carbon Farm Planning has been piecemeal up until now, but USDA Climate Smart Commodities funding managed by Foodshed will provide four years of funding for at least 30 Carbon Farm Plans, which the Ag Team will review and verify. NRCS funding managed by the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD) is supporting a needs assessment and site assessment for urban and minority producers, a group that is regularly overlooked.

As the team grew, we invested our time in building relationships with and better informing the producers we serve. Field staff collected 47 soil samples from more than 16 farms and ranches across the breadth of our jurisdiction, from Potrero to Bonita in the South and Santa Ysabel and Escondido in the North. We conducted 36 site visits, more than one third of which were in Escondido or Valley Center; 10 of those visits were for irrigation evaluations. Staff provided technical assistance on more than 100 acres for CDFA Healthy Soils and Zero Foodprint grant recipients,



including compost and other beneficial practices. Data was added to a database of more than 100 soil samples taken by the RCDGSDC, which will be used to identify gaps needed for monitoring soil carbon accumulation and practice effectiveness. Mission RCD, UC Cooperative Extension and Cal Poly San Luis Obispo provided training in irrigation evaluations to develop this growing program. Field Technicians will be more effective with environmental monitoring with the purchase of a variety of soil augers and specialized irrigation evaluation equipment. Although demonstration site funding is ending, Field Technicians will continue to monitor soil organic matter at the Tijuana River Valley and Rancho Jamul to develop a long-term soil dataset for regenerative practices. Collaborations with regional RCDs through the Southern California Carbon Farming Hub will expand our capacity for carbon farm planning and conservation practice implementation.

#### 2022 COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 47 soil samples collected from 16 farms and ranches
- 36 site visits conducted at farms and ranches
- Technical assistance provided to 7 sites comprising 100 acres
- Grant funding of \$627,000 awarded to support agricultural programs, including a new irrigation efficiency program



Opposite page: Joel taking irrigation pressure readings at Ramona Ranch Vineyard. Top Right: Cover crop in deciduous orchard in Campo with support from Zero Foodprint. Bottom Left: UCCE's Gerry Spinelli recording irrigation flow volumes at Ramona Ranch Vineyard. Bottom Right: Sage Hill.

## Supporting Farmers and Ranchers *Outreach and Education*

The RCDGSDC excels as a connector of the many local groups working to conserve resources, and outreach and education continue to be a major focus for our department. In 2022 we held 11 outreach events ranging from technical assistance to policy advocacy, including two field days and three webinars focused on our demonstration projects. We also presented at eight partner events and cultivated partnerships with the County Farm Bureau, County Department of Ag Weights and Measures, San Diego Food System Alliance, Community Alliance with Family Farmers, and the Cattleman’s Association, among others. 79 new readers subscribed to the Farmer and Rancher monthly newsletter - a more than 75% increase - including 46 new agricultural producers. The Department is shifting away from in-house practice demonstration by completing two of our three carbon farming demonstration projects, including the Carbon Farming Plot at the Tijuana River Valley and the Prescribed Grazing pastures at Rancho Jamul. Recognizing that much of the technical assistance is currently focused on North Inland San Diego, we focused new technical assistance on the South San Diego Bay and East County producers and increased outreach to Tribal communities. Going forward, staff identified the need to broaden the community served by prioritizing low-income residents, producers of color and vulnerable farm businesses.

The San Diego Agricultural Planning Program identified, monitored, and assessed the ownership of active agricultural lands within the San Diego region to strengthen the agricultural industry. This two-year planning grant was funded by the California Department of Conservation through the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program. The project is managed by the San Diego Local Agency Formation Commission and coordinated by the Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County with

support from our regional partners. RCDGSDC worked with partners at Mission RCD, Community Health Improvement Partners, and Foodshed Inc. to identify the primary concerns of the agricultural community by distributing a needs assessment to more than 100 producers and holding two public listening sessions. Contractors at San Diego State University and Dudek contributed to mapping the extent of agricultural lands in the County and estimating the carbon stored on those lands. RCDGSDC facilitated a series of policy meetings to identify the priority policy concerns and channel participants into three working groups to demonstrate progress on the issues of Land Access, Water Availability and Workforce Development. Outreach Staff engaged more than 150 stakeholders in the agricultural industry for this continuing advocacy effort.

2022 COMMUNITY IMPACT

**Technical assistance**

- 36 total farm visits for technical assistance
- TA for conservation practices on 100 acres
- 10 site visits for irrigation evaluations specifically
- 47 soil tests for soil organic matter on 16 farms

**Education and outreach**

- 11 educational or advocacy workshops
- 267 event participants, including 102 producers
- Engaged more than 150 stakeholders in the ag industry for policy advocacy
- 325 newsletter subscribers, including 140 farmers and ranchers



Right Top: Andy explaining the benefits of mulching at our Healthy Soils demonstration plot in the Tijuana River Valley. Bottom Left: Flowers in bloom at Beeworthy Farms in Encinitas. Bottom Right: Local ranchers gather at Rancho Jamul for an RCDGSDC workshop about prescribed grazing.

## Wild Willow Farm & Education Center

Wild Willow Farm is nestled in the Tijuana River Valley Regional Park between the ocean, the US-Mexico border, and City of San Diego. The farm is a community space for visitors of all ages to connect to nature, the land, and food. It offers a peaceful place to unwind and learn about regenerative farming practices that grow soil, produce, and community. In 2022, Wild Willow welcomed community members to participate in volunteer days, workshops, field trips, farm stands, and tree planting events. This provided outdoor activities for the local community and an opportunity to learn and meet like-minded people. This year, we worked with Lumercycle and Mongol Tribe on the Food Oasis in a Food Desert Project. The goals of this project were to increase participation and accessibility to the farm by adding trails and shade, creating a self-guided tour, and building local school connections. Educational plaques were created by Chula Vista High School students and placed along the trail so that visitors can walk through the fields and learn about each landmark along the way. During the event we also planted seven fruit trees with CVHS students to create shady gathering spaces and provide habitat for beneficial wildlife. Through the Food Oasis Project, community volunteer days, and an event with OneTreePlanted, Wild Willow was able to plant over 50 new fruit trees in 2022.

In the fields, we increased production to continue providing the community with fresh fruits and vegetables. Farmers worked hard year-round to grow garlic, cabbage, tomatoes and so much more. Farm staff also did a trial run of flower sales and were able to produce almost \$500 in sales to local florists. Our CSA program grew and we started hosting a weekly farm stand to provide healthy food to the local community.

In 2022, we once again opened the farm in the summer for a strawberry U-pick opportunity which brought in new connections that resulted in more volunteers and interns. The farm hosted seven free workshops through our Urban Agriculture and Conservation Grant from the NACD that reached approximately 60 students. These workshops taught various topics including soil fertility, propagation, pest management, gardening for pollinators, and compost basics.



Field Trip at Wild Willow.

**Field Trips:** We welcome schools, groups, and clubs of all kinds to visit the farm to see first-hand how a small working farm operates. This learning opportunity teaches students about compost, seeds, regenerative agriculture, and the roles that animals play on a farm. In 2022, we taught approximately 1,755 students through 67 field trips for local schools and groups.

**Workshops:** From beer brewing and beekeeping to mushroom cultivation and baking with ancient grains, we teach a diverse array of fun and educational workshops. We hosted 30 workshops over the course of the year and sold 290 tickets. This year, we invited 5 external educators to join us at the farm and share their knowledge through new workshops.

**Farm School:** For the more serious minded, we offer an eight-week course teaching the fundamentals of regenerative farming. In 2022, we taught three sessions of Farming 101 and educated 54 students about the importance of sustainable farming.



Fire Cider Workshop taught by external educator Cindy Saylor.

**Internships:** Our 12-week internship program develops individuals into budding new farmers and/or good food community advocates. Interns work alongside staff in tending the fields, harvesting and packaging produce, and supporting all other on farm activities. In 2022, we hosted 15 interns who paired their internship with knowledge from classes and workshops. Of the 15 interns, two have developed their internship into new careers in urban agriculture and as beekeepers.

**CSA Farmshare (Community Supported Agriculture):** In 2022 CSA membership ranged from 47-61 subscribers who received a weekly or bi-weekly produce bag containing a variety of nutrient dense, regeneratively grown, seasonal produce. We delivered a total of 1,265 CSA bags to four different neighborhoods in the county, totaling 6,280 lbs of produce. CSA sales in 2022 brought in \$42,973 of revenue to the farm.

**Volunteers:** Wild Willow was open to the public one day a week to give community members a taste of the things a farmer does while preparing and growing seasonal produce in San Diego. In 2022, the farm welcomed 1,081 volunteers who provided 3,242 hours of labor and assisted with animal care, CSA harvest, weeding, and planting.

**Community Functions & Events:** Individuals, clubs, and corporate groups are all welcome to get their hands dirty by volunteering at the farm. The farm is also available to host weddings, meetings, birthday parties and outside workshops. This year we hosted 10 field events with approximately 182 participants.

**Food2Soil Program:** We participate in a composting collective that benefits the local community by turning food waste into a resource. In 2022, we composted 750 pounds of food waste from bucket drops through this program.

## Forest Health and Fire Prevention *Working to make our region more resilient to wildfire*

In 2022, our Forest Health & Fire Prevention Team grew. We hired a Forestry & Fire Prevention Program Manager to lead up our landscape-level wildfire resilience programs and started hosting two Fellows from the GrizzlyCorps program, an Americorps program designed by Project Climate at UC Berkeley's Center for Law, Energy, and the Environment in partnership with CaliforniaVolunteers. This program sends recent college graduates into rural communities across California to promote regenerative agri-food systems and fire and forest resilience. They aim to expand capacity for organizations working on community resilience and climate action while bolstering the next generation of professionals at the forefront of climate change solutions. Our fellows are working on GSOB Mitigation, San Diego County's Prescribed Burn Association, and supporting education/ outreach efforts in our department.

Work has continued this year on our Saving San Diego's Last Mixed Conifer Forest project, a collaborative approach to active fuels reduction and reforestation funded through the CAL FIRE Forest Health program. The project area encompasses roughly 1,575 acres on Palomar Mountain, in northern San Diego County. Project partners include Pauma Band of Mission Indians, USFS Cleveland National Forest, La Jolla Band of Luiseno Indians, CalTech Observatory, and Palomar Land and Cattle. Multiple sustainable benefits of this landscape scale treatment include: forest health, wildlife habitat, increased carbon storage, and community protection. The project is at 50% completion and is projected to be completed in 2023.

Three new grants were secured in 2022 that leverage our current efforts to further impact. These include a block grant from CAL FIRE through the California Association of RCDs to support capacity building for fuels reduction, burning, and grazing; an agreement with SDG&E to support community protection and defensible space assistance for homeowners; and a CAL FIRE/ California Fire Safe Council County Coordinator grant to support 18 months of funded staff time to strengthen regional collaboration efforts.

## *Capacity Building: Regional Forest and Fire Capacity (RFFC) Program*

Through the RFFC program, funded by the Department of Conservation, we are working to support partner capacity, project readiness, implementation of demonstration projects, and regional priority planning to achieve landscape-level and community wildfire resilience in our region. In 2022, we hosted a series of convenings with our local collaborative group, and broader efforts with our SoCal RFFC grantees network; each with the intention of sharing resources, and aligning state, local and federal frameworks to identify and implement landscape scale solutions.

This year we worked towards creating a Regional Priority Plan (RPP), which will culminate in a story map that gives context to wildfire threat and the unique natural resources in San Diego County. The RPP will also include a list of projects and planning efforts that can be implemented to increase our resilience to wildfire. We conducted outreach and held meetings to engage organizations, tribal nations, agencies, and other stakeholders throughout San Diego County, to collect information about priority projects and partnerships that they see as critical to the areas they serve. We also developed a project collection system to help identify and document priority projects. Among other benefits, these projects will contribute to forest health, wildfire resilience, and community safety. Our initial data collection window closed in December 2022. Ultimately, we aim to increase awareness about the needs in our region, and how federal and state funding could support local efforts, partnerships, and facilitate outreach and education opportunities.

Throughout the year we supported development and implementation of 10 capacity building demonstration projects. These projects address topics such as hazardous fuels reduction, reforestation, workforce training, roadside brushing, development of management plans and environmental compliance documents, prescribed burning, and Gold Spotted Oak Borer (GSOB) monitoring, research, and treatment.



## Indigenous Fire Stewardship Pathway Cadre and Stewardship Pathways Program

In collaboration with Climate Science Alliance and the Tribal Working Group, the Stewardship Pathways Program was developed to address many of the capacity issues in the region, such as tribal workforce development, tribal collaboration, needs for fuels crews, and cultural and prescribed burning.

The program is open to people from across Southern California who are interested in creating or expanding a career focused on advancing Indigenous climate stewardship. Climate Science Alliance staff oversee the administration and management of the program and have developed the Southern California Interagency Wildland Fire and Fuels Cadre, a group of agency partners, who contribute their time and expertise to plan and implement the training. The program is hosted by the La Jolla Band of Luiseño Indians, under the leadership of Chief Wesley Ruise Jr. and Joelene Tamm. This wildland fire and fuels training program is unique in that it brings technical training together with climate science and traditional knowledge - participants learn about tribal fire stewardship and prescribed fire while receiving the certifications necessary to become a wildland firefighter and Tribal Cultural monitor working on the fire line. Fire is an inherent and necessary feature of our landscape, and through this program participants learn valuable skills that can help build a career path around wildland fire management, tribal fire stewardship, and fuels reduction. The program began in 2022 and is scheduled to continue through 2025.

## State Parks NACC Program (Round I)

In 2021 the RCDGSDC was invited to collaborate on a new pilot program to engage local indigenous youth in workforce training in forest management practices. The Native American Conservation Corps (NACC) Program was the vision of staff at CA State Parks - Colorado Desert District, a vision that was shared by our team at the RCDGSDC. In collaboration with State Parks and the San Diego River Conservancy, an early supporter and funder, we participated in creating and managing this innovative and impactful program. Other partners include the Kumeyaay-Diegueno Land Conservancy and the Santa Ysabel Lipay Nation.

The program was designed along the lines of a Conservation Corps with the objective to offer youth from local tribes knowledge and on-the-job experience during their six-month training session in the Cuyamaca Rancho State Park. Ultimately the goal of the NACC program is to provide youth with on-the-job training and experience needed to access careers in forest management and wildland fire. The program ran one session in 2022 and will continue through 2023.

### 2022 COMMUNITY IMPACT

- Supported the annual monitoring and treatment of 2,700+ oak trees
- Supported the development and implementation of 10 capacity building demonstration projects.
- Hired 2 new employees to assist the Forest Health and Fire Prevention
- Three new grants were secured that leverage our current efforts to further impact



Top: Stan Hill and Anthony Alvarado discuss post 2003 Cedar Fire reforestation on Middle Peak. Bottom: NACC (Native American Conservation Crew), part of our RFFC Workforce Capacity demonstration project.

## Fire Safe Council of San Diego County

### Keeping San Diego County Fire-Safe for 25 Years!

For 25 years, the RCDGSDC has administered the programs and funds of the Fire Safe Council of San Diego County (FSCSDC). The FSCSDC, a 501c3 organization with its own Board of Directors, serves as the managing organization for the network of 41 community Fire Safe Councils (FSC) in the county by organizing and facilitating regular meetings, networking events, and workshops, also providing technical support, resources, educational material, and fiscal sponsorship to these community groups.

In 2022, we hosted bimonthly in-person General Membership and Executive Committee meetings. We hosted monthly virtual Coffee Chat meetings for our community Fire Safe Councils to network, learn, and share resources. In June, the FSCSDC hosted its annual Volunteer Awards and Appreciation Event with 100+ guests in attendance. Community FSC groups along with partners from federal, state, and local agencies, Elected Officials, and community organizations participated to honor the hard work of 11 community FSCs, volunteers, and partners, who go above and beyond to make San Diego safer from wildfire.

A new partnership between the FSCSDC, San Diego Regional Fire Foundation, and San Diego Gas and Electric was cultivated this year. We drafted an agreement that would allow us to leverage our individual work to strengthen and empower community FSCs, and align our efforts to fund critical community projects. Through this program, we were able to award \$122,500 to 18 Fire Safe Councils in 2022.

We continued to support community Fire Safe Councils, Tribes, and other community groups this year with Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs). We do this through providing technical assistance, a document template, facilitating writers' workshops, and coordinating the review and approval process. Currently, there are 40 approved CWPPs in San Diego County, 33 of them were produced by community Fire Safe Councils. This year, we hosted three CWPP writers' workshops, led by the FSCSDC

Board President in collaboration with representatives from CAL FIRE, Bureau of Land Management, and San Diego County Fire. Through this process, we supported 10 communities with creating or updating a CWPP document. Additionally, we hosted a tribal specific CWPP Workshop session for the first time this year. The RCDGSDC hopes by offering this resource to tribal nations we can help increase accessibility to future grant funding opportunities.

In collaboration with our agency partner educators and community FSCs, we facilitated several unique education opportunities that address issues such as fire behavior, defensible space, ignition reduction, home hardening, evacuation preparedness, and more. This included four Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) workshops and three Last Chance Survival Simulation (LCSS) workshops.

**2022 COMMUNITY IMPACT**

- Provided support and technical assistance to forty-one fire safe councils
- Hosted four WUI workshops
- Three Last Chance Survival workshops
- Participated in four Wildfire Safety Fairs
- Hosted nine FSC Coffee Chats
- Hosted six General Meetings for community Fire Safe Councils
- Hosted three CWPP workshops, as part of our writers' workshop series
- 40 total CWPPs in the County
- Supported 10 communities with creation or amendments to CWPPs this year
- Honored 11 community FSCs at the Volunteer Awards
- Along with SDG&E and San Diego Regional Fire Foundation we were able to award \$122,500 to 18 fire safe councils in San Diego County



Top Left: Wynola WUI Workshop with Grizzly Fellows. Top Right: SDGE Safety Fair with Stan. Middle Left: Last Chance Survival Workshop in Portero. Bottom: Jorge Reyes after DSAP and Border 42 fire.

## Fire Safe Council of San Diego County Chipping and Defensible Space

FSCSDC offers two programs that are free to homeowners. The No-Cost Chipping and Defensible Space Assistance Programs (DSAP) aim to educate homeowners about defensible space, fire preparedness, and the importance of protecting their structures and communities, and provide support to meet defensible space requirements.

Both programs are in high demand and participants regularly contact us with feedback. Here are some words of thanks from our community members:

*"The workers were very professional. They accomplished a great deal of work in their time on my property. I was extremely happy with the way my property looked when they were finished and felt much safer from the danger of fire."* - DSAP Participant

*"This program has made it possible for me to keep myself and my neighbors safer from wildfires. I used to do it all myself but I am no longer a "spring chicken" and between the 4 joint replacements & just getting older, I can no longer do it. Being on a very low, fixed income now means participating in this program is critical to me."* - DSAP Participant

*"I'm very happy with the program, it helps me out greatly. I did the clearing, but don't have access to a truck, so it's impossible to get rid of the cleared brush for me. I'm always glad to see the dead pile of fuel disappear!"* - No-Cost Chipping Participant

*"Very happy with the contractor. He had good communication and his workers were excellent, very respectful and friendly. They were hard workers and had the pile chipped in no time!"* - No-Cost Chipping Participant



After Defensible Space Assistance.

**2022 COMMUNITY IMPACT**

**341 No-Cost Chipping services provided**

- 3,828,505 cubic feet of fuels treated
- 2,835.53 acres protected, 452.29 acres treated

**203 Defensible Space Assistance Program services provided to disadvantaged homeowners**

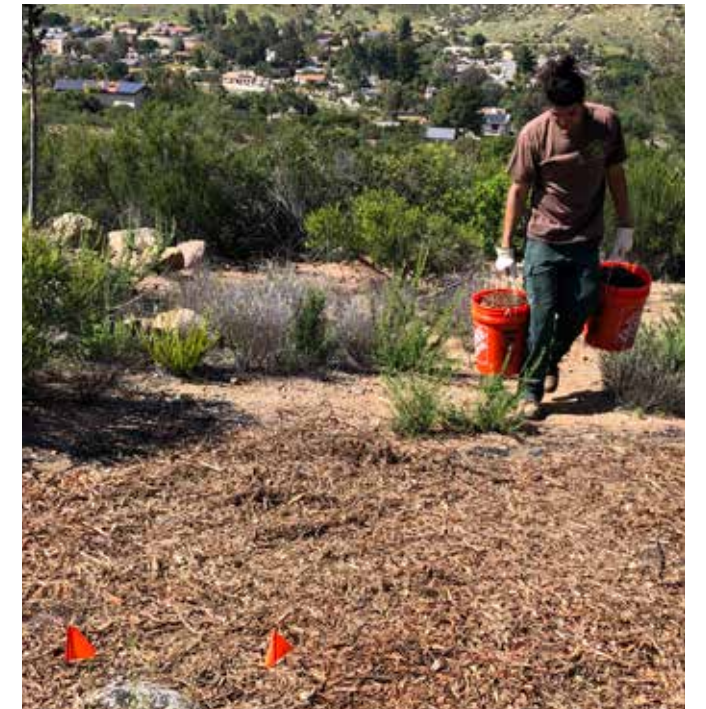
- 6,683,961 cu/ft of fuels treated
- 920.79 acres protected, 99.52 acres treated

## Habitat Restoration Through Invasive Species Removal

Invasive plants draw from limited water resources while contributing to natural hazards like fire, flooding and habitat degradation. The RCDGSDC is committed to restoring local ecosystems, both on the farm and in natural habitats. We focus habitat restoration on our most vibrant and sensitive landscapes - the riparian corridors of our reservoirs and rivers. Chronic drought paired with heavy use of our limited local supplies have strained the quality and quantity of native ecosystems. San Diego County imports approximately three-fifths of its water supply from the Colorado River and other distant sources. We are committed to conserving this precious resource for future generations. We believe that better utilizing our local supplies can relieve the pressure on native wetlands, while making our communities more resilient despite drought, flooding, population growth, and climate change.

### PROPOSITION 84 - HEALTHY HEADWATERS PROGRAM

The RCDGSDC is working with regional partners to restore riparian habitat along tributaries of the El Capitan catchment of the San Diego River. This multi-year, multi-million dollar grant is funded with Proposition 84 funds from the Department of Water Resources, and distributed by the San Diego County Water Authority through the Integrated Regional Water Management. Four regional partners are focusing on invasive plant control and slope stabilization in different sections of the catchment, including the City of San Diego, Back Country Land Trust, San Diego River Park Foundation and the U.S. Forest Service. Habitat management activities included initial treatment, retreatment, biomass disposal and, in selected locations, revegetation of riparian habitat and chaparral. In the past year, partners held several volunteer days to survey native habitat, restore disturbed areas, remove invasive plants and shuttle the biomass through canyons and reservoirs. Community education and outreach is a major focus, where multiple partners have installed educational signage, held public events, surveyed the public about their knowledge and trained private landowners to manage their lands



US Forest Service spreads mulch at their educational kiosk on the upper San Diego River.

adjacent to conserved habitat. The RCDGSDC encouraged collaboration among grant partners who educate community members about invasive plants and how to remove infestations. In addition, the RCDGSDC reached out to new community partners who can target sources of invasive plants to increase the footprint of this work. The River Park Foundation completed their grant deliverables this year, with other partners scheduled to complete their projects in 2023.

**2022 COMMUNITY IMPACT**

- 1.95 acres treated for invasive species
- Social Media Reach: 24,185
- Habitat Restoration Volunteers: >75
- Community Knowledge Surveys about Invasive Plants: >100
- Species of Concern Observed: Southwestern Pond Turtle, Cougar and others
- Community Event Attendance: >300

## Supporting High School Conservationist Creating Environmental Stewards for the Future

Every year the RCDGSDC works hard to conserve and protect our natural resources through various programs. But all of this would be in vain if we didn't also focus on the education of today's youth. One day we will no longer be the shepherds of this earth and we will pass the torch to the next generation. This is the reason why we focus so heavily on education and provide the tools for our next generation to live in harmony with the earth. We are committed to supporting high school seniors who have a passion for environmental science and agriculture. Through college scholarships, Range Camp, speaking competitions, and hands-on learning activities, we encourage high school students to learn about sustainability which will potentially lead them into a conservation related field.

A highlight of 2022 was our Speak Off Competition which received the highest number of applicants since we began the program. Nine students submitted passionate speeches about the issues of drought in California and how RCDs can make a difference, and one student was selected to present at the annual conference of the California Association of RCDs.

*"I just wanted to take a moment to say thank you for all the planning and bookings you handled for Jessica and I. We had a great time and Jessica was appreciative, excited and of course a bit nervous for the opportunity. Everyone from your office was helpful and kind and genuinely made Jess feel welcomed."* - Jaime Garcia, guardian of our Speak Off winner Jessica Garcia

Our scholarship program allows us to support conservation-minded high school seniors with college scholarships, a program we have proudly maintained for 35 years running! This year we awarded nine students with a \$1000 scholarship -the highest number of awardees we have ever selected! In addition, our Board of Directors made the decision to honor our late board member Jim Thompson by renaming the scholarship the Jim Thompson Conservation Scholarship.



Top: Scholarship winner Paige Beals. Bottom: Scholarship winner Midalia Garcia.



Regional Speak Off winner, Jessica Garcia, with RCD staff at the CARCD Conference.

This year we also awarded two students with a sponsorship to Range Camp. This is a week-long opportunity where students learn about soil, plant families, creek health and wildlife surveying techniques. The goal of Range Camp is to introduce students to the professional world of plant, animal, and landscape management.

*"Range Camp was amazing. I am grateful for RCDGSDCs sponsorship. Range Camp really opened my eyes. I learned and met so many people. At the start of camp, I really didn't know much about range and never would have guessed how important it is. I saw my first Red wood forest (it was amazing), vaccinated 3 sheep with amazing people, learned about wildfires, learned how to identify different plant species, and made amazing friendships and so much more."* - Nadia Garcia, Range Camp sponsored student

We also work with high school students through hands-on programming. In 2022, the RCDGSDC worked with Chula Vista High School (CVHS) and other partners to create a self-guided tour at Wild Willow Farm. Students were asked to research agricultural topics and create content for plaques for a walking tour. This encouraged students to learn about their local environments and dive deep into the importance of sustainable farming. We hosted

80 CVHS students at Wild Willow Farm to plant trees at the farm and learn about agriculture. RCDGSDC staff also assisted CVHS with planning and planting native habitat on their school campus.

### 2022 COMMUNITY IMPACT

- Nine environmentally-conscious high school seniors received \$1,000 college scholarships to pursue degrees in conservation-related fields
- Received 22 Conservation Scholarship applicants
- Two students were awarded the Range Camp sponsorship and had the chance to learn about agriculture and conservation in Half Moon Bay.
- Received 9 Speak Off applications and picked one student to advance to the State Competition at the CARCD Conference.
- Supported one high school intern at Wild Willow Farm
- 146 scholarships awarded since 1989
- Worked with 80 Chula Vista High School students to plant trees and create content for the self-guided tour at Wild Willow Farm

## The Watershed Connection Education Program *Reducing Pollution and Protecting San Diego Bay*

This year, the RCDGSDC continued its long-standing partnership with the Port of San Diego to educate hundreds of elementary students about watersheds and pollution prevention. In 2022, we secured funding through the Port to continue running the program from 2023-2025. This year we improved upon the virtual presentation which allowed us to cut down on staff and travel costs. Students learned all about watersheds, including how pollution travels from urban areas, through creeks and rivers, into bays and the ocean. This interactive, science-based learning program also teaches students what they can do to protect their local watershed, reduce pollution in their communities, and become environmental stewards. Students are led through a video presentation and a jeopardy game to keep them engaged and excited. Below are examples of some photos that students view to prompt critical thinking discussions about the severity of pollution in the San Diego Bay Watershed and the importance of taking action. The RCDGSDC has been teaching this program for over 25 years and each year we are inspired and moved by the passion that this presentation evokes from students.

In 2022, the RCDGSDC focused on the constitution of an education internship role to support the function of the Watershed Connection program. This internship opportunity is intended to support these students as they build career experience and teaching skills. It also provides additional program staffing support, strengthens the RCDGSDC’s partnership with local colleges, and helps the RCDGSDC meet our match funding requirements as intern time is quantified as an in-kind contribution.



**2022 COMMUNITY IMPACT**

- 70% of the elementary school teachers rated the program experience and content delivery as excellent
- Worked with two college interns to support the Watershed Program
- Pre- and post-test records indicated that every participating class had an increase in understanding the connection between pollution & watershed health
- Students “pay it forward,” by sharing their new-found knowledge with family members
- Interns added over \$5,258 in match funding and in-kind contributions from 180 volunteer hours
- We educated 1,159 students through 48 virtual presentations at schools within the San Diego Bay Watershed

## Watershed Connection - Teacher Feedback

*“I think it was done in a good way and I feel it was appropriate for my students. I love the watershed replica and the use of pollutants to show what happens to it all when it rains.”* -Educator at Casillas Elementary

*“It was very relevant. The pollutants discussed were very familiar to students and they were able to learn ways to reduce pollution in their everyday lives.”* - Educator at LGEA Elementary

*“The program was right on target for my students and done very well virtually”* - Educator at Halecrest Elementary

*“The presentation was very powerful for our students. The whole presentation was excellent! The photos of the trash on the bay beach, the hurt animals, and the watershed model were relatable and appropriate for 2nd grade.”*

- Educator at Dewey Elementary

*“I think it was very age appropriate. Even the pictures of the injured animals were very critical for our students to see. Several of their comments were about them feeling guilty for the damage they were causing without knowing the real consequences. A little guilt can go a long way.”* -Educator at Emory Elementary

*“I think my students understood the content perfectly and it was presented in a fun and educational way! Thank you!”*

- Educator at LGEA Elementary



Opposite Page: Student learning at El Toyon Nature Day. Above: Watershed model representing stormwater in San Diego.

## School Garden Support

### *Outdoor Classroom for Creating Life-long Learners*

When young students are taught to garden it creates a strong connection to the land as well as an understanding of where food comes from and exposure to healthy food choices. Bringing students outside to work in the soil allows them to learn in a tactile way and helps to release stress. In 2022, the RCDGSDC continued to offer school garden support to students throughout San Diego County. For over 20 years we have worked alongside teachers to provide resources, training, and information for those that are interested in teaching lifelong gardening skills. This year the RCDGSDC supported school gardens by offering free plants through our Annual Plant Giveaway in partnership with Altman Plants, and by providing resources through an email newsletter and by teaching students about the importance of pollinators.

In 2022, the RCDGSDC was awarded a block grant from Monarch Joint Venture via the CARCD. We have been working with three other California RCD's to pilot a pollinator education program that focuses on the monarch butterfly and addresses education, partnership, and habitat goals identified in Monarch Joint Venture's 2021 Monarch Conservation Implementation Plan.

Instructors engage with local schools to teach about western monarch conservation through classroom visits and habitat restoration projects. This free program teaches students about pollinators, what they are, how they are beneficial, and what pollination is. It also discusses the insect life cycle and parts of a flower with interactive learning experiences. The presentation is designed to build student awareness of their environment and the importance that pollinators play in our everyday lives. This is a one-hour program that can be taught virtually or in person depending on teacher preference. It is available for 2nd grade students within San Diego County.



Field Trip learning about composting with worms.

### 2022 COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 2,500 vegetable & herb seedlings were given away to support 250 school gardens and local backyards
- Two School Garden Newsletters sent to provide school garden resources and funding opportunities
- RCDGSDC staff are available to offer gardening advice to teachers and parent volunteers
- Since 2010, we have distributed 20,340 vegetable & herb seedlings to hundreds of school gardens
- Taught 336 students through 11 presentations about the importance of pollinator habitat and monarch conservation
- Provided resources to local museums to educate the public about pollinator support

## Pollinator Health

### *We Need Pollinators... And They Need Us!*

The RCDGSDC continues to support pollinator health through education and outreach, as well as on the ground pollinator habitat projects. This year, we focused on expanding the San Diego Native Milkweed Project, supporting local and regional networking and collaboration, and working directly with farmers and ranchers in our district to create more pollinator habitat on working lands.

The objective of the San Diego Native Milkweed Project is to develop a source of native milkweed seed and plants for local pollinator habitat creation at both the garden and restoration project levels. In 2021, our commercial growing partners at S&S Seed Company harvested 18lbs of regionally native *A. fascicularis* (Narrowleaf milkweed) seed, so in 2022 we scaled up engagement with growers and the public to distribute this abundance! Through social media campaigns, public presentations and partner programs, we shared a total of 2.46 lbs of seed to over 200 community members. With a goal of making this seed source more commercially available, we contacted nurseries and seed companies serving our region and connected four foundations doing restoration work and three nurseries with S&S seed company to purchase seed. In 2023, we are planning a San Diego Pollinator Week from May 8th - 14th to promote pollinator education, conservation and native habitat restoration.

To serve farmers and ranchers more specifically, we kicked off the Working Lands for Pollinators program. This work is funded by the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and aims to establish more native pollinator habitat on San Diego farms and ranches. With a field team of partner biologists from Point Blue Conservation, NRCS, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Earth Discovery Institute, we conduct site assessments and offer technical assistance and resources for the implementation of land management practices that benefit pollinators and other wildlife.



Honey bees at Wild Willow Farm.

### **SAN DIEGO POLLINATOR ALLIANCE**

The RCDGSDC is a founding member of the San Diego Pollinator Alliance (SDPA), a network of agencies and organizations working together to raise awareness about the plight of pollinators, while empowering local residents to take action to support pollinators. Membership has grown to include 24 partner organizations, with three new members from San Diego Audubon Society, Water Conservation Garden and UC San Diego. We increased our outreach this year by offering pollinator gardening presentations and sharing packs of free native milkweed seed to the public.

### **SO CAL POLLINATOR NETWORK**

The RCDGSDC facilitates the SoCal Pollinator Network, a new regional working group that aims to unify pollinator conservation efforts throughout Southern California. Since its inception in late 2021, membership has grown to 32 partner organizations and we have hosted seven meetings.

### 2022 COMMUNITY IMPACT

- Gave 8 pollinator garden presentations to share information about monarch health and habitat creation
- Attended 4 public fairs
- Completed 6 Working Lands Site Visits
- Published Restoring Pollinator Habitat on Working Lands guide
- RCDGSDC shared information and resources to local residents who want to help pollinators

# RESOURCE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION OF GREATER SAN DIEGO

*Expanding the Reach and Impact of the RCD*

The Resource Conservation Foundation of Greater San Diego - a 501(c)(3) non-profit - was created in 2016 to help expand the RCDGSDC's programs and capabilities. Like the RCDGSDC, the Foundation's mission is to protect, conserve, and restore our County's natural resources through education and fundraising.

The Foundation allows us more flexibility in pursuing funding opportunities. Diversifying our funding sources enables us to better serve our community and bring greater conservation benefits to San Diego County.

In partnership, the RCDGSDC and its Foundation seek funding to restore and protect the county's watersheds, promote nutrition and stewardship through sustainable agriculture, and revitalize pollinator habitats. The Resource Conservation Foundation supports the work that the RCDGSDC accomplishes; especially at Wild Willow Farm and Education Center.

## RESOURCE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION BOARD MEMBERS

**Donald Butz**, Board President

**Marilyn Huntamer**, Board Vice President

**Odette Gonzalez**, Secretary/Treasurer

**Diane Moss**, Director

**Neil Meyer**, Director

**Maggie Sleeper**, Director



View of Solidarity Farm in Valley Center, a regional hub for carbon farming practices and education.

## OUR FUNDERS

*We are grateful for the following funders who support our work*

**California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD)** - Block grants from Monarch Joint Venture, National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, the Wildlife Conservation Board, and CAL FIRE

**California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA)** - Healthy Soils Program, CUSP Economic Relief, Farm to School Program, and Water Efficiency Technical Assistance Program

**CAL FIRE** - Cal FIRE's Forest Health Program, as part of California Climate Investments

**California Fire Safe Council** - USFS State Fire Assistance (SFA) administered by CAFSC

**County of San Diego** - Tax assessments

**Department of Conservation** - Regional Forest and Fire Capacity (RFFC) & Sustainable Lands Conservation (SALC) Program

**Hervey Family Fund**

**National Association of Conservation Districts**

**Natural Resources Conservation Service**

**Port of San Diego**

**Private Donors**

**Proposition 84** - Department of Water Resources

**San Diego Foundation** - Through a collaborative Opening the Outdoors grant in partnership with Lumbercycle

**San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E)** - Environmental Champions & Wildfire Funds Program

**San Diego River Conservancy** - The Governors Wildfire Early Action Plan

**US Fish & Wildlife Service** - Partners for Fish & Wildlife Program

**Zero Footprint** - Restore CA



Top: Sprouts in the Wild Willow Farm greenhouse. Bottom: Crops at Wild Willow Farm.



# OUR PEOPLE

*Dedicated to Serving San Diego County Residents*

## RCDGSDC BOARD MEMBERS

**Donald Butz**, Board President

**Marilyn Huntamer**, Board Vice President

**Odette Gonzalez**, Secretary/Treasurer

**Diane Moss**, Director

**Neil Meyer**, Director

**Maggie Sleeper**, Director

## RCDGSDC STAFF

**Andy Williamson**, Irrigation Technician

**Ann Baldrige**, Executive Director

**Ashleyann Bacay**, GrizzlyCorps Fellow

**Carolina Guia**, GrizzlyCorps Fellow

**Cheyenne Piacenza**, Wild Willow Farm:

Assistant Farm Manager

**Chris Kelley**, Director of Finance

**Codi Hale**, Outreach Coordinator

**Daniela Mejia**, Community Garden Coordinator

**Elizabeth Garcia**, Agricultural Technical Assistant

**Erik Rodriguez**, Wild Willow Farm: Farmer

**Gregg Cady**, Farm Conservation Advisor

**Heather Marlow**, Director of Forestry & Fire

Prevention Programs

**JJ Tidwell**, Wild Willow Farm: Farmer

**Joanna Parra**, Wild Willow Farm: Farmer

**Joanne Sauerma**, Office Coordinator

**Joel Kramer**, Agricultural Specialist

**Kim Hanson**, Wild Willow Farm: Field Trip Coordinator

**Morgan Graves**, Fire Prevention & Forestry Coordinator

**Paul Maschka**, Wild Willow Farm:

Regenerative Farming Educator

**Rachel Lloyd**, Accounting Clerk

**Sierra Reiss**, Education Coordinator

**Stan Hill**, Forestry & Fire Prevention Project Manager

Left Top: Paul, Erik & Mae working in Wild Willow fields. Right Top: Attendees planting trees at the OneTreePlanted event. Middle: Students with Paul at container gardening workshop. Left Bottom: Joanna working with plants in the greenhouse. Right Bottom: Attendees learning to make gopher cages at the OneTreePlanted event.





**RESOURCE  
CONSERVATION  
DISTRICT**  
Greater San Diego County