

# 2019-2020 ANNUAL REPORT



YOUR PARTNER IN CONSERVATION

education and outreach  
habitat restoration  
research and monitoring  
landowner assistance  
wildfire resilience

## FROM OUR EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Dear Friends of the RCDSMM,

Perhaps never before has the close of an RCD fiscal year been more radically different than it's beginning. In July of 2019, we were excitedly looking forward to our ongoing and new projects and programs, conducting research, designing and completing habitat restoration projects and public outreach gatherings to inform our work, and looking forward to an active school year with thousands of schoolchildren immersed and learning in our mountains and waters.... And, for the first half of FY 2019-2020 the work went much as planned—then, of course, we entered March 2020. We went from a staff crammed into a sometimes too small but highly-energized office, to a staff of faces crammed on too-small screens.

Looking back over the year, we mourn the loss of some RCDSMM extended family, but also see a year of exceptional growth for our organization. Thanks to the support of our community and volunteers and the resilience of our staff, the RCDSMM not only persevered, but even expanded our work in this Home Place we serve. We continued to monitor species throughout the Santa Monica Mountains, added entirely new distance-learning content to our place-based environmental education offerings, gave over 100 community stakeholders a sense of shared authorship of the future of Topanga Lagoon, completed with our partners the definitive website on wildfire resilience in the region and provided defensible space guidance at individual homes (appropriately distanced of course), and completed vital design phases for the Liberty Canyon Wildlife Crossing Project.

I am proud of our staff, community, and volunteers, and grateful to our partners and funders for the creativity and flexibility they showed in supporting our work. I am even grateful for the challenges of FY19-20, for the opportunities that emerged from them. We are pleased to present here a report on what we accomplished during that most unusual time. We now have new ways of working together and being of service in the care of our common home, and have discovered new skills and strengths within our community. With those relationships and partners we look forward to 2021 and the ongoing challenge to conserve and enhance the health of our ecosystems, our mountain communities, and our companion species.

In partnership,  
Clark Stevens, Executive Officer



### Inside Our Annual Report

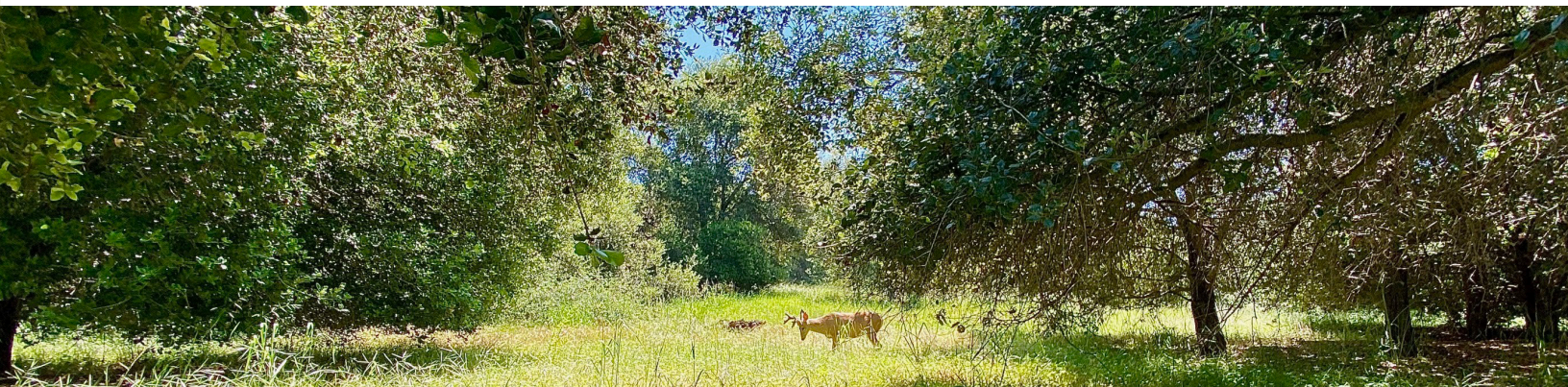
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# YOUR RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Proudly serving our local community for 60 years, the RCDSMM offers programs and services focused on bettering the environment for people and wildlife through enhancement and stewardship of our natural resources. The RCDSMM restores lagoons and oak woodlands, monitors endangered species, provides environmental education to thousands of students each year, helps landowners prepare for wildfires, educates the public and elected officials about environmental issues, creates conservation plans and designs wildlife passages, among many other things. We are dedicated to making the Santa Monica Mountains a thriving place for people and nature.



## OUR MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains is to promote land stewardship and resource conservation through ecological research, conservation planning and design, habitat restoration and environmental education, while adhering to the highest standards of transparency and accountability as a public agency.

## WHAT IS AN RCD?

A Resource Conservation District (or RCD) is a special district organized under the State Public Resources Code. RCDs are directed to promote and provide conservation programs within their communities. Such programs may include, but are not limited to, education, research, and assisting/advising other public and private organizations and local citizens in the areas of land-use planning, soil and water conservation, wildlife habitat enhancement and restoration, control of exotic species, and watershed restoration.

The RCDSMM is part of a national network created by the Soil Conservation Service (now the Natural Resources Conservation Service) during the dust bowl days over 80 years ago.

There are 96 Resource Conservation Districts in the state of California alone. The primary objective of California's RCDs is to assess conservation problems, set priorities, and coordinate federal, state, and local resources to bring about solutions.

**A RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT IS NOT A RULE-MAKING, REGULATORY AGENCY.**

It can, however, advise such agencies and act as an intermediary between them and concerned citizens. Certain federal benefits are available to counties and cities only through these special districts. RCDs can lease or own land, publish the results of their research, contract to perform restoration projects and educational programs and, if needed, operate facilities for the enhancement and conservation of our natural resources.

# YEARLY HIGHLIGHTS

## 2019-2020

### Planning for Future Oak Woodlands

The RCD worked with NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory to analyze areas of the Santa Monica Mountains ideal for oak tree survival as the climate changes. By identifying these zones at satellite level, we can predict which areas of the mountains will be optimal for oak growth and development, enabling us to plant for the future.



### RCD Contributes to Creation of State Seal of Civic Engagement

In September of 2020 the State Board of Education approved the State Seal of Civic Engagement to recognize civically engaged students. RCD was part of a statewide working group supporting the development of this seal, focusing on showcasing best practices for CA Special Districts and schools to work together.



### Community Members Become “Bad Beetle” Detection Detectives

Invasive beetles have taken a toll on native trees in the Santa Monica Mountains. This innovative, volunteer-driven project trained dozens of community members to identify evidence of invasive shot-hole borers in native trees in their neighborhoods, parks and wildland areas to understand and combat the spread of these harmful pests.



### Restoring Topanga Lagoon for the Future

For years the RCD has been involved in the design and restoration of Topanga Lagoon. This year the RCD oversaw initial studies needed for permitting and held the first public meeting to gather community input on design elements for the future of this invaluable ecosystem.



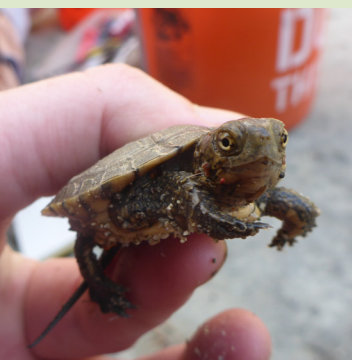
### Another Successful Fall Educator Training

Fall Educator Training proved to be a huge success with almost a dozen new educators joining the team! Recruits received training on bird identification, climate change impacts, local ecosystems, and native fishes. They even had the opportunity to get their feet wet while seining Malibu Lagoon! If you are enthusiastic about kids and the environment, join our Educator team and make a difference.



# YEARLY HIGHLIGHTS

## 2019-2020



### Frogs and Newts and Turtles, Oh My!

The RCD continued amphibian and turtle surveys throughout the Santa Monica Mountains, a project that started in 2000 in collaboration with NPS, Pepperdine University and USGS. Stream team members joined RCD biologists to comb the creeks in search of frogs, turtles and newts to monitor trends in population abundance and diversity.



### Fire Wise Demonstration Structure

The RCD finished the architectural design and construction of a demonstration "house," allowing homeowners to see best management practices for hardening their structures against wildfire. Each side of the structure displays a different style and fire safe features. The next step in this exciting project is to plant four different styles of fire-wise gardens to complete the defensible space learning landscape.



### Audubon Teacher Training Adds Project WET

The RCD and San Fernando Valley Audubon Society host an annual training for teachers that participate in our education programs. Utilizing interactive, hands-on activities, teachers explored the world of birds, watersheds and macroinvertebrates. This year, each teacher walked away with a Project WET book, filled with NGSS supported, watershed-based education activities sure to delight any student or educator.



### Creating Refuge in Santa Monica Mountain Creeks

The RCD undertook a critical effort to restore refugia pools in local creeks. Refugia pools offer ideal habitat for threatened and endangered species, but due to wildfires these pools filled with silt and ash. Thanks to our partners at the CA Conservation Corps, CA Dept. of Fish & Wildlife, Balance Hydrologics and CalFire for helping us create space for wildlife.

### Decades of Steelhead Monitoring Continue

Southern steelhead trout are a vital indicator of healthy creeks. In 2019-20, the RCD continued its decades long monitoring of steelhead in Topanga Creek. Through snorkel surveys, habitat mapping, redd surveys, tagging, etc., the RCD has documented the state of this endangered species, informing conservation and restoration decisions.



# covid-19

## HOW OUR EDUCATION DEPARTMENT PERSEVERED

The ability to adapt has always been a critical skill in the world of environmental education. RCD educators have had to adapt to changes in weather, late buses and even snakes blocking hiking trails. So it came as no surprise when COVID changed in-person education, the RCD Education Department continued to deliver high-quality programming.

RCD Ed began the 2019-20 season ready for an incredible year with a mix of seasoned and new educators, and by mid-March had already delivered 59 field and 13 in-class programs. But then schools around the nation closed, in-person education was prohibited and everyone shifted to virtual learning.

Immediately following school shutdowns, RCD educators traveled to local creeks, forests, lagoons and city streets to film virtual field trips. Staff created lessons around these videos using innovative educational platforms while maintaining rigorous adherence to state science standards. Students met with our educators and scientists via video conferencing technology to ask questions and

share their experiences. While nothing can replace a field trip in nature, RCD Ed provided students a way to connect to and learn about the natural world until they can return to in-person trips.

Though it was a difficult year, it was also a year of growth for RCD Ed. Overnight the department changed its entire programming.

When students go back to school and field trips resume, RCD Ed will be well positioned to help students make even stronger connections with the wild spaces around them.

Built on a strong foundation sixty years in the making, the RCD will continue to show resilience and the capacity to face challenges head on to ensure environmental education continues in the Santa Monica Mountains and beyond.







# creating passage

## THE WILDLIFE CROSSING AT LIBERTY CANYON

Envision an expansive and lushly vegetated bridge traversing one of the busiest highways in the United States. RCD Executive Officer Clark Stevens, along with many partners, has been working hard to make this dream a reality. In 2019, his schematic design for the wildlife crossing over Highway 101 at Liberty Canyon was completed.

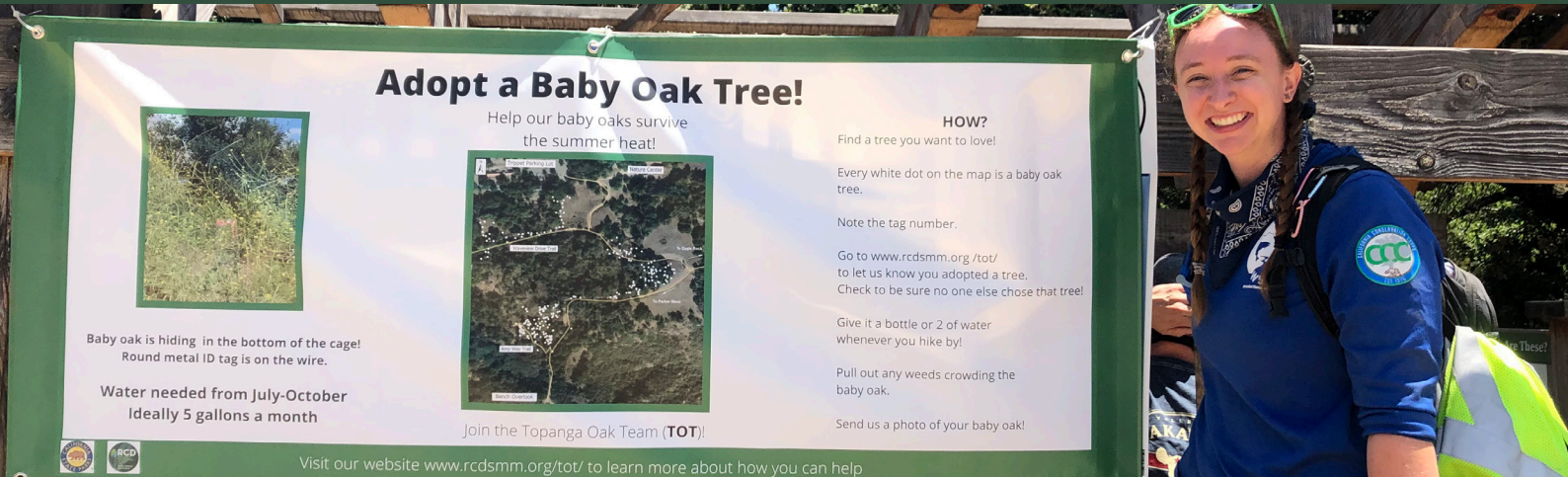
The purpose of this ambitious project is to create passage for species endemic to the Santa Monica Mountains. Mountain lions, deer, bobcats, grey foxes, coyotes, jackrabbits, and even badgers can all be found in the mountains of Los Angeles, but this hybrid wild-anthropogenic space with bustling intersecting freeways poses unique challenges for these species. The wildlife crossing will provide safe migration opportunities, helping ensure the genetic diversity of these remarkable animals.

The overpass alone would not attract these elusive critters if surrounded by inhospitable habitat. In order to entice wildlife, the area around the overpass and Liberty Canyon underpass also had to be restored, which was nearly complete until the Woolsey Fire in 2018 destroyed the site. The RCD, supported by the CA Wildlife Conservation Board and working alongside Urban EcoScapes, replanted what had been lost and will continue to maintain this space through 2022.

With the surrounding habitat restored and overpass planning underway, this natural highway is well on its way to becoming reality. The wondrous species that call the Santa Monica Mountains home can look forward to a bright and spacious future.







# adopting baby oaks

## SAVING OAK WOODLANDS THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In California, oak trees face serious threats from prolonged drought, invasive beetles, deforestation, wildfire and extreme temperature days. Our Research and Restoration team conducts ongoing monitoring to track the health of mature oak trees while also organizing community driven volunteer events to ensure newly planted oak seedlings receive the essential care they need during their most vulnerable time.

Suddenly in March of 2020, our volunteer events, like the rest of the world, shut down. Just two months before the pandemic, the RCD had planted 200 young oak trees at Topanga State Park's Trippet Ranch. RCD staff alone could not hope to water all these newly planted trees, and we knew the first few months of establishment were essential to the developing seedlings.

We feared for the survival of these young oaks, but then inspiration hit. Our local community members hike Trippet Ranch fervently during summer months, so we decided to call on these hikers to water a tree

or two while they trekked the mountain trails. Through emails, flyers, and signs and banners posted at the park, we reached out to our community. Little did we know just how excited they would be to help young trees.

Nearly 100 of our trees were adopted and have continued to receive water throughout the spring and summer, despite the cancellation of our volunteer events. Thanks to the dedication of our community, 79% of those trees adopted are still thriving!

We plan on promoting this project again in the summer of 2021, knowing that we can rely on our community to ensure the continued survival of native oak woodlands.





## OUR SERVICES

# services

HABITAT RESTORATION

RESEARCH AND MONITORING

WATERSHED PROTECTION

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION  
OF NATURAL RESOURCES

LANDOWNER ASSISTANCE

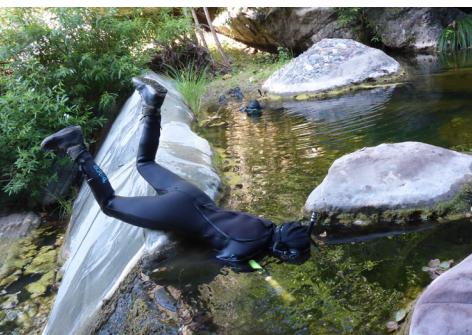
COMMUNITY WILDFIRE RESILIENCE



The RCDSMM works with public and private landowners to conserve natural resources.

We focus on the following in our projects and activities: restoring native habitat and monitoring endangered species, providing environmental education to local schools, translating scientific research into practical solutions, promoting water conservation and improving water quality, collaborating on local projects with our partners, including local, state and federal agencies and organizations, and offering a variety of volunteer opportunities.

# OUR PARTNERS



CalTrout  
 California Association of  
 Resource Conservation Districts  
 California Coastal Conservancy  
 California Department  
 of Conservation  
 California Department  
 of Fish and Wildlife  
 California Department  
 of Forestry and Fire Protection  
 California Department  
 of Water Resources  
 California Oaks Coalition  
 California State Parks  
 CalTrans-District 7  
 City of Agoura Hills  
 EarthEcho International  
 Havasi Wilderness Foundation  
 Heal the Bay  
 LA County Fire Forestry Division  
 LA County Beaches & Harbors  
 LA County District 3 Supervisor  
 Sheila Kuehl  
 Las Virgenes Municipal  
 Water District  
 Las Virgenes  
 Unified School District  
 Linkage Implementation Alliance  
 Los Angeles Audubon Society  
 Los Angeles County  
 Department of Public Works  
 Los Angeles Regional  
 Water Quality Control Board  
 Mountains Restoration Trust

NASA DEVELOP  
 National Marine Fisheries Service  
 National Park Service SMMNRA-NPS  
 Natural Resources  
 Conservation Service  
 North Topanga Canyon  
 Fire Safe Council  
 Oak Park Unified School District  
 San Fernando Valley  
 Audubon Society  
 Santa Monica Bay  
 Restoration Commission  
 Santa Monica  
 Mountains Conservancy  
 Santa Monica Mountains  
 Fire Safe Alliance  
 Santa Monica Mountains  
 National Recreation Area  
 Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians  
 Southern California Coastal  
 Water Resources Program  
 The Boeing Company  
 The Santa Monica Bay Foundation  
 TreePeople  
 US Fish and Wildlife Service  
 (Ventura and Carlsbad)  
 UCLA Stunt Ranch  
 Santa Monica Mountains Reserve  
 University of California Cooperative  
 Extension - Los Angeles County  
 Water Education Foundation-  
 Project WET  
 Western Rivers Conservancy  
*...among many other partners  
 too numerous to list.*



# OUR STREAM TEAM AND VOLUNTEERS



## STREAM TEAM MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS ARE VITAL TO OUR RESEARCH AND RESTORATION EFFORTS

The RCD’s Research and Restoration department relies heavily on hardworking, part-time employees known as Stream Team Members. These seasonal workers keep our field operations running and they do it with unmatched enthusiasm.

Our field work isn’t run by Stream Team members alone however. We are also gifted with an incredible and supportive community of volunteers without whom many of our field projects would not happen.

Throughout 2019 and 2020 our Stream Team members and volunteers supported essential restoration and outreach work including oak restoration, crayfish monitoring, Topanga Lagoon monitoring, amphibian surveys, creek cleanups, and education program development. We are indebted to this incredibly hardworking group of humans. Thank you for all you do!





## OUR EDUCATORS



### THE HEART AND SOUL OF OUR EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Our educators began the 2019 school year with more programs scheduled than any year in recent memory and by March they had already led 72 of these programs. When covid changed the world of outdoor education, our educators transitioned swiftly into virtual and distance learning, creating brand new interactive and innovative programs that enabled the RCD to continue providing vital environmental education to students that would not otherwise receive it. Despite the challenges this year brought, our educators made the best of every moment spent with students and we could not be more grateful.





# OUR BOARD & STAFF

## Our Board of Directors



R.C. Brody  
President



Steve Rosentsweig  
Vice President



Nancy Helsley  
Treasurer



Beth Burnam  
Director



Laurie Price  
Director



Dennis Washburn  
Associate Director

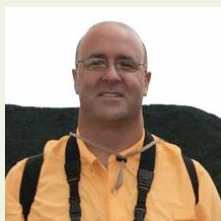


Deborah Klein Lopez  
Associate Director

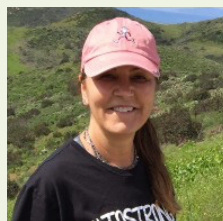
## Our Staff



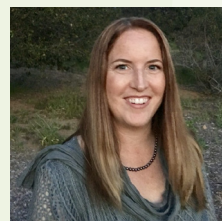
Clark Stevens  
Executive Officer



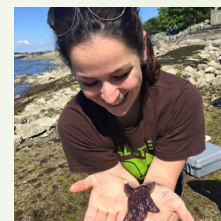
John Hendra  
Finance &  
Operations Officer



Lyn Rauls  
Administrative  
Assistant



Kelly Kazmirchuk  
Education  
Coordinator



Angelica (Jelly) Kahler  
Education &  
Communications  
Specialist



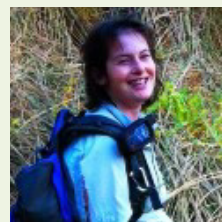
Rosi Dagit  
Senior Conservation  
Biologist



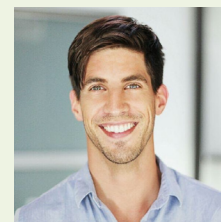
Steve Williams  
Conservation Biologist



Parker House  
Conservation Biologist



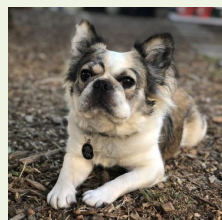
Rachel Burnap  
Conservation Biologist



Antoine Kunsch  
Community Resilience  
Coordinator



Rachel Kieffer  
Watershed Steward



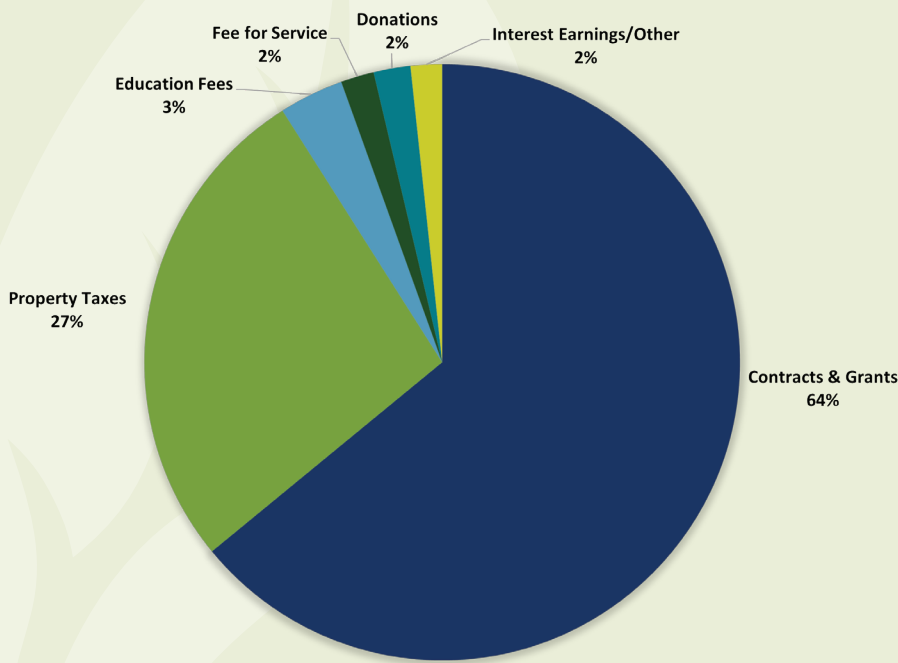
Edison "Eddie" House  
Goodwill Ambassador

# FINANCIAL INFORMATION

For every \$1 invested the RCD brought in \$2.70 to enhance and protect our community's natural resources.



## Revenue by Source



## Actual Revenues and Expenditures

Revenues	
Contracts & Grants	\$914,442
Property Taxes	\$356,350
Other	\$85,915
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,356,707</b>
Expenses	
Personnel	\$734,851
Contract Services	\$444,629
Supplies/Other	\$147,497
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,326,977</b>
<b>Net Change in Funds</b>	<b>\$29,730</b>

The RCD of the Santa Monica Mountains is funded by competitively sought grants from public agencies or private foundations, contracts for education, research, and restoration services and from donations. As a non-profit local government special district, the RCD can receive tax deductible donations under Internal Revenue Service Code Section 170 (b) and 170 (c) (1). The RCDSMM is partially funded by a <0.001% portion of residents' regular property taxes, an investment the RCD uses to bring 2.7 times this funding into the district for projects and programs. The RCD is audited annually by an independent CPA firm as required by California Public Resources Code Section 9528 and Government Code Section 26909. Please see our website for the most recent audits.



## SUPPORT THE RCD WITH YOUR DONATION

Supporting the RCDSMM means supporting your local community and helping to conserve your local soil, water, and wildlife.

### Why donate?

donate

RESTORE NATIVE OAK WOODLANDS

ENHANCE HABITAT FOR ENDANGERED  
AND THREATENED SPECIES

PROVIDE INVALUABLE ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL STUDENTS

INCREASE COMMUNITY FIRE RESILIENCE

PROVIDE LOCAL VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

HELP GROW OUR COMMUNITY  
BEYOND THE MOUNTAINS



Your donation supports our work to restore habitat, monitor wildlife, conduct research, and provide environmental education to all students throughout Los Angeles and Ventura Counties.

Most of our annual budget is supported by competitively sought grants and contracts, which is not enough to support our entire staff and all the projects we hope to accomplish. Without your generous donations, the RCD could not accomplish vital community building and conservation work.

All contributions and donations made to the RCD are tax-deductible.



## A CLOSING MESSAGE

Thank you for supporting your RCD by staying up-to-date on our latest projects and programs. If you connected with or felt inspired by any of these programs, help support this work by donating.

Whether you donate your time or your dollars, you will be supporting critical restoration and education work, making our community stronger and more resilient. Thank you!

## HELP THE RCD WITH YOUR DONATION

Supporting the RCDSMM means supporting your local community, and helping to conserve your local soil, water, and wildlife. Make a donation now:

[rcdsmm.org/donate](http://rcdsmm.org/donate)



540 S. Topanga Canyon Blvd., Topanga, CA 90290  
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