

2021-2022 ANNUAL REPORT



YOUR PARTNER IN CONSERVATION

FROM OUR EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Friends of the RCDSMM,

Thanks to your ongoing support and commitment, together we made it through yet another fruitful year, filled with community building, important habitat restoration, innovative climate solutions and meaningful collaboration.

The past year has seen several novel projects for your local RCD. We completed our design work on California’s largest wildlife crossing and handed it off to Caltrans to see to its completion, took pivotal steps towards the long-awaited restoration of Topanga Lagoon, experienced unprecedented growth and capacity building as we added new territory, staff, positions and a new community resilience department, and explored innovative approaches to conservation by engaging our community in ways we never have before.

Along with accomplishing important restoration work, we felt overwhelming gratitude for the continued support of our dedicated district members. Our community showed their support by showing up in droves to our various volunteer efforts, including caring for over 300 coast live oaks, removing invasive crayfish from local creeks, and helping install a system to preserve threatened western pond turtles. Not only did our district show up for restoration, but they also supported us through their dollars by donating to causes that enhanced our shared ecosystem. This support fills us with hope and excitement as we plan to expand our district and thus our community services in the years ahead.

Within this annual report you will find stories of some of the projects mentioned above as well as updates on other exciting programs from the past year. I invite you to stay up-to-date throughout the year by joining our mailing list to receive quarterly e-newsletters or follow us on social media to discover what is happening at your local RCD day-to-day.

In gratitude,

Clark Stevens



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YOUR RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT



Proudly serving our local community for over 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 every year, prepares communities 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.

WHAT IS AN RCD?

A Resource Conservation District (or RCD) is a special district of California. Special districts are local governments created by the people of a community to deliver specialized services the city or county could not otherwise provide. RCDs specifically are directed to promote and provide conservation programs within their communities. Such programs may include education, research, and assisting/advising other public and private organizations and local community members 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 over 80 years ago. There are 96 Resource Conservation Districts in the state of California alone.

RCDs ARE NOT REGULATORY AGENCIES. They can, however, advise such agencies and act as intermediaries between them and community members.

YEARLY HIGHLIGHTS

2021-2022

RCD Helps Break Ground for One of the World's Largest Wildlife Crossings

On Earth Day 2022, Save LA Cougars, alongside many partners, hosted the official Wallis Annenberg Wildlife Crossing Groundbreaking Event, during which the official name for the crossing was unveiled. The RCD's Executive Officer, Clark Stevens gave a speech inspired by an adventurous roadrunner who had already taken advantage of the restored habitat surrounding the crossing.



Your RCD Increases Capacity for Wildfire Preparedness

Our Community Resilience team has hosted four Wildfire Preparedness Trainings throughout the year, preparing over 80 interested community members to lead Home Ignition Zone Evaluations in an effort to enhance the fire resiliency of communities within and beyond our district borders.



The RCD Films Its First Music Video

RCD biologists working to restore Topanga Lagoon invited project partners and community members to star in a music video! Through this video, we hope to reach a wider audience and engage new community members in the restoration process. Special thanks to song writer Peter Alsop, our Gabrielino-Tongva Tribal liaison music writer Robert Dorame, and our directors and editors Colin Rosemont, Joshua Roth and Wilson Stiner.



More Education Programs Offered to More Students

Our education department has been hard at work leading outdoor field trips at Malibu Lagoon, Topanga State Park and Sepulveda Basin as well as conducting virtual and on-campus programs at schools throughout Los Angeles and Ventura. This school year we were able to offer 216 education programs to 6,410 students at 68 schools. We look forward to serving even more students and community members via our expanded program types in the year to come.



YEARLY HIGHLIGHTS

2020-2021

Shout Out to Our Incredible & Dedicated Oak Care Volunteers

Throughout the year, your RCD hosted bi-monthly volunteer events at Trippet Ranch. During these 22 Oak Care Events, 211 volunteers assisted our Stream Team in caring for over 300 young Coast Live oaks planted throughout Topanga State Park.



Removing Invasive Crayfish for the Good of Steelhead & Newt

Starting in late summer, we resumed our Invasive Crayfish Removal events, during which volunteers are outfitted with bits of hotdog tied to string and dispensed along creek banks in an effort to lure elusive crayfish from shaded hiding spots. Over 1,075 crayfish were removed last year for the betterment of endangered and threatened native species like the Steelhead Trout and the California Newt, whose eggs are both voraciously consumed by these invasive crustaceans.



Restoring Monarch Habitat at Leo Carrillo State Park

The overwintering Monarch habitat at Leo Carrillo State Park was decimated by the 2018 Woolsey Fire and has since suffered flooding and erosion due loss of creek bank stability. Our biologists have partnered with State Parks to restore this vital ecosystem, and we want to extend an emphatic thank you to all the volunteers who have joined the effort!



Dan Cooper Joins Your Local RCD

Dr. Dan Cooper joins the RCD as a Senior Conservation Biologist! As author of Important Bird Areas of California (Audubon California 2004), Dan is recognized as an authority on CA bird ecology. Dan has also designed numerous monitoring projects and assessments throughout the greater LA area and has taught courses on local ecology at Loyola Marymount and UCLA. We are honored to have Dan as a part of our growing team and are thrilled about the wealth of knowledge he will bring to this new position.



RCD Community Generosity Continues to Inspire

Our community once again proved how philanthropic they can be! Since our last annual report, our community has raised nearly \$32,000 to help restore, preserve, and monitor our shared ecosystem. We continue to feel inspired and uplifted by our district members and look forward to providing new services and growing our own capacity to better serve our diverse community.



conserving and building habitat

FOR WESTERN POND TURTLES

Another year of phenomenally low rainfall and long hot days created dire conditions for aquatic species in the local creeks. One such species is no stranger to your RCD - the Western Pond Turtle.

For over twenty years, the RCD has been monitoring these turtles throughout the Santa Monica Mountains, tracking population numbers, mapping available reproduction pools, exploring suitable habitat and quantifying spawning behavior. Our biologists have focused recent efforts on identifying refugia pools or areas within the creek in which depth and temperature regimens are suitable for turtles to mate and forage year-round. Unfortunately, our team observed an alarming decline in available refugia, and it was determined that without swift action, our resident population may all but disappear.

So in September of 2021, our biologists worked in tandem with dedicated community members and fellow scientists to test a first-of-its-kind effort to transport pH and temperature balanced fresh water up steep mountainous terrain directly to the refugia pools that turtles still inhabit. And it worked! In 2022, we set out with 15 hard-working volunteers in hopes of offering a permanent solution.

On a warm morning in April, we piled into the bed of our work truck, drove a short distance to the project site and began the steep climb up the mountain, laying 2,000 feet of water irrigation pipes as we hiked. Eventually, we reached the turtle pools where we engineered a design to ensure a slow trickle from

connected pipes into the ever-shrinking pools. The team then divided into two - Team One focused efforts on piping, while "Beaver Team" was tasked with repairing an earthen dam near a large pond that seasonally feeds turtle refugia pools and is continuously degraded by avid hikers. Our newly human-constructed dam will ensure structural integrity of this gateway.

After a few hours it was time to turn on the water and test our ingenuity! Our team gathered near the turtle pools and waited with bated breath to see if the water could successfully traverse the steep incline and flow into the pools. After more than a few excruciating minutes and minor adjustments, the water successfully wound its way up the pipes and began to drip-drop into the ponds. Monitoring throughout the remainder of the summer proved that water levels in the pools were consistent, and the project has been deemed a success!

Our sincerest gratitude to all those that supported this innovative preservation project through labor and donations! Your efforts are sure to positively impact our Western Pond Turtle community for many of their future generations.





calfire grant enables rcd

TO LAUNCH DEFENSIBLE SPACE WEBSITE AND MORE

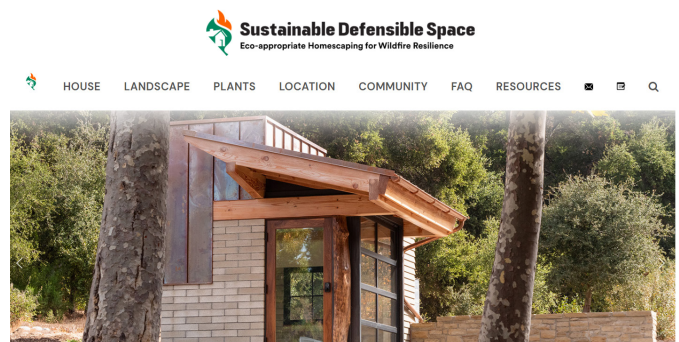
Your RCD has been thoughtfully expanding our newest department - Community Resilience - and taking on exciting endeavors to create more wildfire resilient and fire-wise communities throughout our district.

We were awarded a grant by CalFire and have utilized funds to develop a website (defensiblespace.org) dedicated to sharing fire-wise information including best management practices for defending your home as well suggested plants that help create a resilient garden. In addition to funding the development and design of this website, we will also be creating videos and pamphlets containing information from the website in an easy-to-access virtually engaging format.

This grant has also allowed us to further build our Home Ignition Zone Evaluation program, originally developed in partnership with the North Topanga Fire Safe Council.

Not only have we been able to conduct dozens of evaluations throughout wildland urban interfacing communities, but we've also had the chance to train community members to conduct these evaluations on their own. By utilizing community knowledge, this grassroots approach to fire management will create informed and prepared neighborhoods as our state's fire regime begins to change.

We look forward to continuing this trajectory of growth and serving the complex wildfire needs of our community.





a growing team

FOR A GROWING DISTRICT

We're growing! Our sphere of influence has now expanded to the rim of the valley. In addition to Topanga, Malibu, Agoura Hills, Calabasas and parts of Thousand Oaks, we now encompass the entirety of the San Fernando Valley, extending to the hills that serve as a backdrop to Burbank and Glendale and dipping into the tip of northeast Los Angeles. As our boundaries increase, so too have our staff and services.

We have welcomed another AmeriCorps service member in the form of a GrizzlyCorps Fellow, who will help increase the capacity of the wildfire preparedness programs under our Community Resilience Department. Our Biology Department expanded from one to five full-time conservation biologists, expanding our capacity to provide landowners with biological



assessments, execute sensitive and nesting bird surveys throughout Los Angeles County, further support the years-long restoration project of Topanga Lagoon, and the adding of several new restoration projects throughout CA State Parks. Our education department has also expanded in key staff allowing for an increase in students and community members to be reached through a larger number and wider variety of nature education opportunities.

We are excited to begin serving an even more diverse population and cannot wait to connect with more community members than ever before.



the state allocates dollars

TO PROTECTING SOUTHERN STEELHEAD

Southern California creeks and rivers that once supported both resident and anadromous Southern Steelhead Trout populations have been decimated by wildfire and drought. The RCD coordinated a comprehensive study of steelhead from the northmost stretch of their habitat, the Santa Maria River, south to the US Mexican border documenting only 182 individuals over a 25-year period. With so few appearances, to say that these fish are critically endangered is an understatement.

For over 20 years, RCD biologists have been studying declining numbers of resident steelhead populations throughout Santa Monica Mountain creeks and discovered this genetically unique strain are some of the most resilient in existence thanks to their adaptability to warmer temperatures and ever-increasing passage barriers. Sand-bar controlled seasonal lagoons like those at Malibu and Topanga State Beaches are common within our district, and only connect to the ocean for mere days throughout the year during infrequent rain events. These opportunistic fish are therefore often forced to utilize any available creek to reproduce rather

than the preferred natal streams (streams they were born in), further shrinking the already impossibly slim window that steelhead must utilize to spawn.

Thanks to the efforts of Assemblymember Richard Bloom, the State of California allocated \$2 million in the 21-22 Fiscal Year State Budget to support the recovery of endangered Southern Steelhead Trout, which has enabled the RCD to initiate both short- and long-term solutions.



In the short-term, the RCD is working with consultant Stillwater Sciences to develop an Emergency Response Action Plan for the southern California metapopulation as well as with a Technical Advisory Committee composed of agency, university and local experts, who will guide specific rescue actions for individual watersheds - prioritizing those in critical condition. The plan will be completed by end of 2023 and will guide recovery specific to each creek.

In the long-term, the RCD initiated a collaborative effort in 2000 to restore Topanga Lagoon alongside the State Coastal Conservancy, tribal partners from the Gabrielino Tongva Indians of California Tribal Council, the Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission, the Fernandeno Tataviam Band of Mission Indians, the Gabrielino-Tongva Springs Foundation, the Sacred Places Institute and Gabrielino/Tongva San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians, CA State Parks, Caltrans, County of Beaches and Harbors, as well as public stakeholders and community members. Expanding this vital lagoon will offer steelhead a better chance to journey to and from the ocean and increase biodiversity to support this exceptionally resilient genetic strain. Funds from the State will allow for necessary technical studies, incorporation of stakeholder input, and



preparation of an Environmental Impact Report. The goals of this multifaceted restoration effort are to integrate ecosystem benefits, recreational features, visitor services, emergency elements, historic and cultural significance as a Gabrielino-Tongva ancestral space and rebuild essential steelhead habitat while preserving the surf break.

We are grateful for this funding to further our efforts towards the preservation of Southern Steelhead Trout and are hopeful that this increased protection will reverberate throughout the state for the betterment of the entire species.





services

RESEARCH AND MONITORING

HABITAT RESTORATION

WATERSHED PROTECTION

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN
CONSERVATION

PRESERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

LANDOWNER ASSISTANCE

COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS

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 Climate Investments Program
 California State 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 Fire Science Consortium
 California Oaks Coalition
 California Science Center
 California State Parks
 CalTrans-District 7
 City of Agoura Hills
 Conservation Biology Institute
 County of Los Angeles Fire Department
 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 County
 Department of Regional Planning
 Los Angeles Regional
 Water Quality Control Board
 Los Angeles Unified School District
 NASA DEVELOP
 Mountains Restoration & Conservation
 Authority
 National Marine Fisheries Service
 National Park Service
 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 Bay Foundation
 The Boeing Company
 Theodore Payne Foundation
 TreePeople
 UCLA Institute of the Environment and
 Sustainability
 UCLA Stunt Ranch
 US Fish and Wildlife Service
 (Ventura and Carlsbad)
 US Geological Services
 Santa Monica Mountains Reserve
 University of California Cooperative
 Extension - Los Angeles County
 Urban EcoScapes
 Ventura County Fire Department
 Water Education Foundation-
 Project WET
 Western Rivers Conservancy
 Wildlife Conservation Board
*...among many other partners
 too numerous to list.*



VOLUNTEERS IMPRESSIVE COMMITMENT TO THE CONSERVATION OF OUR LOCAL ECOSYSTEM

Whether the RCD is surveying lagoons along the Santa Monica Mountains, restoring native oak woodlands, removing invasive species, building habitat for threatened species, monitoring sensitive flora and fauna or organizing community science programs, our volunteers support it all.

Even as our ability to gather ebbed and flowed with changing health and safety guidelines, RCD volunteers continued to prove their dedication to conservation could not be thwarted.

As our district grows, we look forward to offering more services to community members and more opportunities for volunteers to get involved in important restoration work.





MEET THE INCREDIBLE NATURALISTS BEHIND OUR EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The RCD has been leading outdoor education programs throughout the Santa Monica Mountains since 1962. Since that time, our programs have been run by dedicated naturalists driven by a commitment to bring young minds from any and all parts of the city to wonderful local outdoor spaces in the hopes of forming personal and lasting connections to the wildlife that exists in the backyard of one of the biggest cities in the nation. This year educators led virtual, on-campus and outdoor programs, reaching over 5,000 students from 68 unique schools.



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

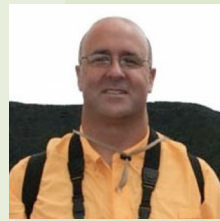


Deborah Klein Lopez
Associate Director

Our Staff



Clark Stevens
Executive Officer



John Hendra
Finance &
Operations Officer



Rebeka Ruiz
Administrative
Specialist



Marilyn Brody French
Education Programs
Supervisor



Jelly Kahler
Education &
Communications
Specialist



Rosi Dagit
Senior Conservation
Biologist



Dan Cooper
Senior Conservation
Biologist



Jamie King
Conservation Biologist



Pauline Allen
GrizzlyCorps Fellow

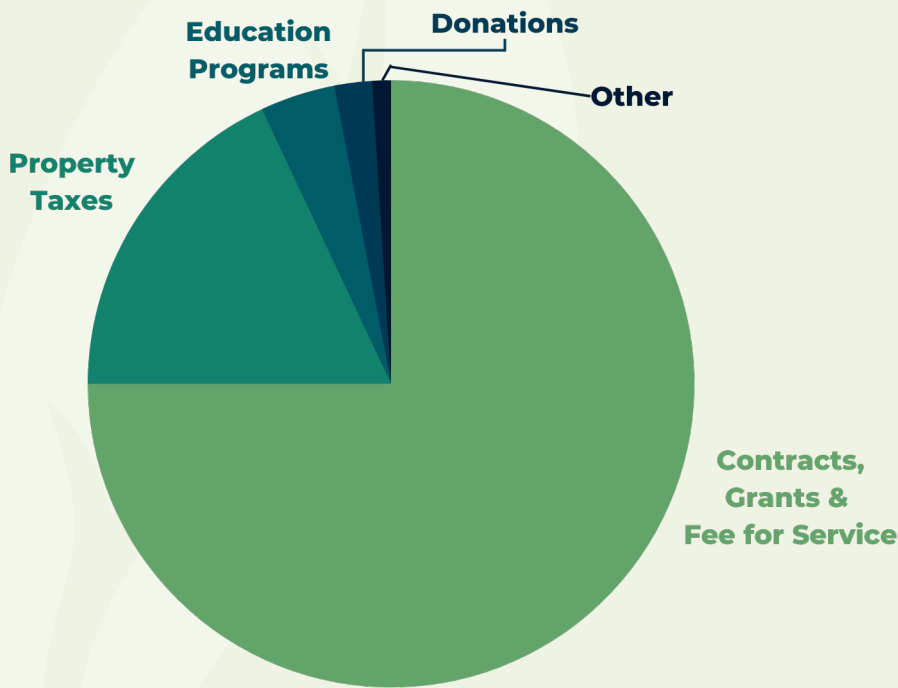


Akosa Ibekwe
Watershed Steward

FINANCIAL INFORMATION



During the 2021-22 fiscal year, your RCD worked on 20 distinct grants that brought in a total revenue of \$1.33 million dollars!



Revenues	
Contracts & Grants	\$1,711,407
Property Taxes	\$412,871
Education Programs	\$92,850
Donations	\$92,850
Other	\$43,671
TOTAL	\$2,270,702
Expenses	
Personnel	\$1,027,791
Contract Services	\$723,952
Other Expenses	\$380,685
TOTAL	\$2,132,428
Net Revenue	\$138,274

The RCD of the Santa Monica Mountains is funded by competitively sought grants from public agencies, 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) (i). 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 YOUR LOCAL RCD

Supporting the RCDSMM means supporting our shared ecosystem by conserving local natural resources like soil, water and wildlife.

Why donate?

donate

RESTORE LOCAL ECOSYSTEM FUNCTIONS

MONITOR ENDANGERED & THREATENED SPECIES

PROVIDE ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

INCREASE YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD'S
RESILIENCE TO WILDFIRE

INCREASE THE CAPACITY AT YOUR RCD TO
BETTER SERVE A DIVERSE COMMUNITY

MAKE INNOVATIVE RESTORATION PROJECTS POSSIBLE



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 this vital conservation work.

All donations made to the RCD are tax-deductible.



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



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