

# Resource Conservation Districts

Local Solutions to California's Natural Resource Challenges



California's 98 RCDs implement the conservation of soil, water and other critical resources in every corner of California by providing technical assistance, financial and educational tools, and training programs for communities including public and private landowners.



## STATEWIDE RESULTS, LOCAL ACTION

The 98 RCDs in the State of California help solve California's pressing statewide issues like climate change, reducing the impact of the drought, protecting clean water, creating habitat for fish and wildlife, restoring critical habitat for endangered and threatened species like Coho Salmon, and reducing the risk of wildfire. Utilizing partnerships with tribes, federal, state, and local agencies, they work citizen to citizen to build better communities, better economies, and a better environment.

## VOLUNTARY CONSERVATION EQUALS REAL AND LASTING CHANGE

RCDs make conservation happen by creating more informed communities that know how to conserve and preserve natural resources. RCDs pass on critical knowledge and create voluntary stewardship of natural resources through conservation projects, education and technical assistance. Their non-advocacy, non-regulatory position makes RCDs approachable and trusted allowing them to engage in resource issues in an objective, science-based manner.

## DEPENDABLE BECAUSE WE ARE ACCOUNTABLE

RCDs are trusted stewards of public and private funds. As Special Districts, RCDs are subject to state transparency and accountability laws. The Brown Act and Division 9 of the *California Public Resource Code* require public meetings, open records, annual audits and financial reporting to the State Controller's Office.

## BETTER CONSERVATION COMES FROM A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

RCDs develop comprehensive solutions in partnership with their community, landowners, decision makers, and science. They consider the full breadth of resource issues in their geographic district and think systemically about solutions to the critical problems of the day. This creates solutions that are long lasting and effective.

## REAL AND LASTING CHANGE IS BASED ON STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

RCDs are governed by locally elected or appointed independent boards of Directors. RCD staff and Directors' relationships with their communities makes RCDs trusted and efficient facilitators of conservation outcomes. As Special Districts created under Division 9 of the *California Public Resources Code*, RCDs are local subdivisions of the state.

RCDs act as a central hub for conservation, connecting communities and individuals with the technical, financial and educational resources they need.



# Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County

The Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County (RCDSCC) serves over 260,000 acres, including diverse agricultural operations, rangeland, public open space, and developed areas and municipalities. The RCDSCC has accomplished innumerable successes in improving water quality, creating new approaches to water supply issues, preserving and restoring habitat, and developing new ways of achieving conservation goals. The RCDSCC uses models of cooperation and voluntary action instead of regulation to solve complex local, regional, and statewide issues. The RCDSCC has been widely recognized as a leader in creating and executing innovative approaches to water issues and land stewardship.

*“The Community Water Dialogue is one of the best things that has happened in the Pajaro Valley in the last 20 years.”*  
- Chuck Allen, Real Estate Specialist

## PROGRAMS

**THE INTEGRATED WATERSHED RESTORATION PROGRAM (IWRP)** was created with the RCDSCC’s leadership over ten years ago as a way to bring state and federal regulatory agencies together to coordinate planning, funding, permitting, prioritizing, monitoring, and outreach for watershed restoration projects. IWRP has been heralded as a model for collaborative, integrated watershed conservation by local partners and key funders, as well as state and federal partners. Ten years after IWRP’s inception, RCDSCC and its partners designed, permitted, and constructed over 80 water quality improvement and habitat restoration projects throughout the County.

**THE PARTNERS IN RESTORATION (PIR) PERMIT COORDINATION PROGRAM** is an outgrowth from and integral facet of the IWRP Program. It provides a streamlined process for navigating the complex web of environmental permitting for landowners wanting to implement voluntary conservation projects. The program requires an investment of time upfront from regulatory agency staff to develop the conditions and standards for the program and then a hands off approach for implementation. Through the PIR Program, more than 80 restoration projects have been implemented in ten years and the program has become the most successful in the state of California.

**THE COMMUNITY WATER DIALOGUES** is a proactive community solution to an archetypal California water dilemma. The Pajaro Valley basin aquifer is widely understood to be in overdraft, resulting in saltwater intrusion into the groundwater resources, and a history of contentious and divisive politics around water issues. The RCDSCC helped lead the community toward a positive and solutions-based approach, forming a voluntary group consisting of farmers, landowners, nonprofit groups, interested private companies, and government agencies. Now three years into the effort, the primary goal of working together to address overdraft and the resulting issues, is manifesting in on-the-ground, community-led projects, including an innovative water conservation project, managed aquifer recharge, and water storage and delivery projects.

**EARLY MITIGATION PLANNING (EMP) FOR TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS** is an emerging project of the RCDSCC, in partnership with the county’s Regional Transportation Commission. The District is leading a group of agencies, including CalTrans and federal, state and local regulatory and permitting agencies in an effort to create the state’s first countywide advanced planning system for mitigating the effects of transportation and highway projects, similar to California’s RAMP program. State and federal government agencies are promoting and moving toward the use of early mitigation planning for transportation projects as a critical tool for increasing collaboration between transportation agencies and public trust resource agencies, project predictability, and effectiveness of mitigation funds to meet regional conservation priorities. The team has already implemented its first pilot project in 2012 and is expected to sign an MOU and create a formal implementation framework during 2014.

- Permitting assistance
- Conservation incentives
- Biological monitoring and assessment
- Stormwater management
- Habitat improvement
- Agricultural water quality
- Restoration
- Fire prevention
- Endangered species protection
- Spanish speaking grower assistance
- Invasive species management
- Water supply
- Erosion control
- Fish passage improvements
- Education
- Outreach



For more information please contact:

Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County  
820 Bay Avenue, Suite 128  
Capitola, CA 95010

Phone: (831) 464-2950  
Fax: (831) 475-3215  
www.rcdsantacruz.org