RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT OF MONTEREY COUNTY

YEAR IN REVIEW 2022

An Ounce of Prevention: Reflecting on 2022 & Embracing the Future

As we find ourselves in the midst of 2023, we can't help but reflect on the record-breaking winter that shook us to the core, highlighting once again the significance of prevention over the exorbitant costs of repair. At the RCD, we strive to assist land managers in undertaking the necessary groundwork to avert or mitigate catastrophic situations like wildfires, floods, or erosion before they happen. This newsletter provides a comprehensive overview of our collaborative efforts throughout 2022, working alongside local farmers, community gardens, agencies, and partner support organizations.

Our ongoing programs, such as Salinas River and Forest Health, continue to make remarkable progress, with stress testing on the river and an array of forestry projects lining up for implementation in 2023. Our bilingual on-farm conservation assistance program has expanded its reach, extending its support to 'urban ag' and community garden conservation planning needs. Our engineer guided the completion of multiple runoff management projects, and the long-awaited establishment of two tailwater denitrification systems has significantly contributed to our goals. Additionally, we are proud to announce that after much anticipation, we have crafted a county permit streamlining program, which has been submitted for implementation by 2024.

As 2023 unfolds, we are compelled to reassess our preparedness for the future. Coincidentally, we are embarking on a strategic plan update in our 2023-24 fiscal year, and we warmly welcome your valuable input. Keep reading for an overview of our achievements in 2022, and keep an eye out for forthcoming invitations to collaborate in shaping a future that anticipates the unexpected challenges posed by weather, water, food, and fire.

Sincerely, *Jennifer Clarke*

2022 Highlights

- Salinas River Programs
- Irrigation Management & Engineering Assistance
- Fire Fuels Reduction
- Urban Agriculture
- Fish Passage Permitting & Permit Streamlining
- RCDMC Board Changes
- Fiscal Year Financial Summary

The Mission of the Resource Conservation District of Monterey County is to conserve and improve our natural resources, integrating the public interest for environmental protection with the needs of agricultural and urban users. We seek to achieve the sustainable management of natural resources including soil, water, vegetation and wildlife throughout Monterey County.

Who's Who

RCDMC Directors
Benny Jefferson, President
Jennifer Clarke, Vice-President/Secretary
Bill Lipe, Treasurer
Brent Plemmons, Director
Jynel Gularte, Director
Aurelio Gonzalez, Director
Ignacio Mendoza, Director
John Doud, Associate Director
Marissa Ritter, Associate Director
Advisors:
Paul Binsacca, Emily Gardner,
Linda Ferrasci, Rebecca King

RCDMC Staff
Paul Robins, Executive Director
Maggie Errea, Finance Manager
Emily Zefferman, Ecologist
Megan Barker, Environmental Scientist
Laura Murphy, Soil Scientist
Adrienne Carter, Civil Engineer
Aysha Peterson, Ag Technical Specialist
Jamie Tuitele-Lewis, Forest Health Coordinator
Brandt Bates, Stream Maintenance Coordinator
Jasmine Ruvalcaba, Field Manager
Tony Tapia, Agricultural Field Technician
Audrey Garcia, Programs Assistant

Natural Resources Conservation Service
Ariel DeLara, District Conservationist
Allison Tokunaga, Soil Conservationist
Javier Flores, Ag Engineer
Jennifer Nowark, Programs Specialist

Spring BBQ Fired up Again in 2022

After a two-year hiatus, the RCD and the Salinas River Stream Maintenance Program River Management Unit Association held a blow-out celebration of our collaborative river work at the Rustique Winery. Along with over 120 guests, we raised $26,578 to support our shared work. Event sponsors included Anonymous Farming Families, JRG Attorneys at Law, Braga Fresh, Kennedy Ag, Burleson Consulting Inc, Alliant Insurance Services, Wilbur Ellis, Noland Hamerly Etienne & Hoss, Pan American, Ocean Mist Farms, Henry Hibino Farms, California Utilities Service, and Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency. At the event, we also honored Board President Benny Jefferson for his more than 25 years of service on the RCD Board and commitment to the Monterey County community and conservation.

Local sponsors, donars and guests gather to celebrate and benefit conservation work on the Salinas River at the beautiful Rustic Winery.

Programs and Results

Salinas River Arundo Control

The RCDMC's Salinas River Arundo Control Program continued with our ninth season in 2022. Drought conditions made arundo treatment more difficult, as many stands we planned to treat went into early dormancy, making herbicide application ineffective. However, we took advantage of the dry river channel to treat arundo on the banks of the main stem along 1.6 miles near Soledad. We also conducted spot treatments across 500 riparian acres in prior treatment areas, and assisted a landowner with 18.5 acres of arundo mowing downstream of treatment areas to-date.

We were excited to receive notice in July that our proposal to the US Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART Program for 150 new acres of arundo control was

Arundo control worker cuts canes away from native trees to prevent overspray.

funded. Work under this funding should begin in summer 2023. Funding for 2022 arundo control came from the California Wildlife Conservation Board, the California Department of Water Resources, the Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and private landowners and farmers. Contact Emily Zefferman for information

Salinas River Stream Maintenance

RCDMC managed the ninth season of the landowner and farmer based, Salinas River Stream Maintenance Program (SMP), maintaining a total of 37 secondary channels including mitigation areas. Acreages worked this year include 167 acres of secondary channel maintenance, 138 acres of arundo removal for mitigation, and 12 acres of sediment management. Since 2021, RCDMC has been the lead on program management and development and is thrilled to see continued growth in landowner participation along the 95 mile stretch of Salinas River. The SMP is receiving particular attention as a result of the 2023 Salinas River flooding. RCDMC has been working closely with landowners on incorporating river restoration activities into the 2023 Fall Work Plan, in particular targeted sediment management activities and debris removal.

RCDMC, in partnership with the Salinas River Management Unit Association, has continued to allocate grant funding available from the California Department of Water Resources through their Integrated Regional Water Management Grant Program. This offsetts permit compliance costs to establish ten new secondary channels. Two secondary channels were implemented in 2022, the remaining eight will be implemented in the Fall 2023 Work Season.

Contact Brandt Bates for information

Soil Health Promotion Activities

In 2022, Soil Scientist Laura Murphy and Ag Technical Specialist Aysha Peterson assisted at least 25 farmers with soil sample collection and interpretation of laboratory analyses and supported 10 farmers with

implementation of mustard cover crops in strawberry furrows for winter erosion prevention. Additionally, RCDMC secured resources to provide reimbursements for small-scale farmers participating in our technical assistance programs to apply compost and cover crops to improve soil health conditions and 20 farmers participated for compost or cover crops applied in 2022.

Contact Laura Murphy or Aysha Peterson for more information

Technical Assistance for Healthy Soils and Water Efficiency

Ag Technical Specialist Aysha Peterson and Soil Scientist Laura Murphy supported farmers with water use efficiency by providing distribution uniformity evaluations (16), scheduling pump efficiency tests (4) and connecting farmers with NRCS staff for EQIP applications and other funding sources to implement water conservation practices. Murphy assisted with implementation and administration of three CDFA SWEEP-funded projects in Monterey County in 2022.

Contact Laura Murphy or Aysha Peterson for more information

USDA-ARS Research Horticulturist (Organic Research Program) Eric Brennan leads a discussion of cover crops for soil health during a field day at ALBA co-hosted by RCDMC in February 2022

Numbers from 2022

16	Distribution uniformity evaluations
500	Acres of re-treatment conducted of riparian ground
25	Acres of Arundo treated & mowed along Salinas River
37	Stream Maintenance Program channels managed
2	Bioreactors
40,000	Square feet of newly planted pollinator gardens

ALBA and Spanish-language Irrigation Efficiency Workshops

RCDMC staff provided technical training to beginning farmers at the Ag Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) throughout the year, including Spanish-language workshops about irrigation distribution uniformity and evapotranspiration-based irrigation scheduling. Regular field visits to farmers at ALBA resulted in further assistance with soil sampling and analysis of results, optimization of fertilizer source and application rates to prevent nitrate losses, and referrals to other resources (such as UC Cooperative Extension) for questions related to pest management and reduction of pesticides.

Ag Water Management Specialist Aysha Peterson has developed a close working relationship with ALBA staff and spends one day per week supporting ALBA farmers and alumni with emphasis on irrigation system design and management. Soil Scientist Laura Murphy continued supporting soil health demonstration projects at ALBA and consulting with ALBA farmers and alumni about nutrient management with an emphasis on nitrogen best management practices. Contact Laura Murphy or Aysha Peterson for more information.

Urban Agriculture at RCDMC

RCDMC staff have been supporting urban agriculture initiatives, emphasizing conservation practices, to improve the health of urban communities in Monterey County. Accessible green spaces in community and school gardens provide unique opportunities and a variety of positive benefits for the environment and people. Restoring public areas in cities with native vegetation and/or edible plants improves access to healthy food, connects communities to their place in local ecosystems and the wider food system, and helps people actively and passively create, benefit, and learn from green spaces and strategies for sustainable and climate smart living.

Volunteers with the Friends of Seaside Parks Association (FOSPA) and the BlueZones Project in Monterey County collaborate on planting a community garden at Havana Soliz Park in the City of Seaside.

In the City of Seaside, RCDMC Soil Scientist Laura Murphy has supported efforts by a coalition of volunteers and organizations (including but not limited to the Friends of Seaside Parks Association, the Blue Zones Project for Monterey County, Sustainable Seaside, the Parks & Recreation and Environmental Commissions of the City of Seaside, the International School of Monterey, the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History and the Habitat Stewards Project) to improve neglected public parks, emphasizing native plant gardens that provide pollinator habitat. As the volunteer effort has grown, Murphy has helped in a professional and volunteer capacity to direct more resources to the project. GrizzlyCorps Fellow Zoe Curcio began a year of service with RCDMC in 2022, in part to build capacity and outreach efforts for this program. In winter of 2022, approximately 40,000 square feet of newly planted pollinator gardens were added to an equal amount of previously planted gardens across 10 parks. Weekly workdays are held every Saturday morning with an average of 20 volunteers each week, and outreach, collaborations, and community engagement efforts continue to increase.

Volunteers weed and mulch native plants during one of the weekly Saturday workdays organized by the Friends of Seaside Parks Association (FOSPA) at Lincoln Cunningham Park along with RCDMC's GrizzlyCorps Fellow, Zoe Curcio (seen right)

Engineering Services

RCDMC Civil Engineer Adrienne Carter developed engineered conservation project designs and guided construction for multiple farming companies.

RCDMC engineer Adrienne Carter and Flow West engineer Paul Frank check flow rates at Bioreactor.

Engineering assistance included assisting with irrigation design and stormwater management and erosion control practices. Carter and Environmental Scientist Megan Barker worked with local conservation partners (Central Coast Wetlands Group, Big Sur Land Trust, Elkhorn Slough Foundations, and Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve) and Monterey County's Housing and Community Development Department to develop the Environmental Enhancement Streamlining Program (EESP). The EESP permit program will be available in 2024 to provide efficient guidance and timelines to achieve permits and implement environmentally beneficial projects throughout Monterey County. Carter continues to assist the NRCS with their site visits and provide general erosion control recommendations for agricultural fields as part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

Forest Health and Wildfire Resilience Program

In 2022, the RCDMC Forest Health and Fire Resilience Program continued full steam, with new grants and progress being made on several fronts to help plan, coordinate, obtain funding and manage forest health and fire resilience work in multiple locations across Monterey County.

RCDMC Forest Health Coordinator Jamie Tuitele-Lewis continued RCDMC engagement with the Central Coast Prescribed Burn Association (CCPBA) to seek additional grant funding for development of the CCPBA to meet the growing needs for prescribed fire management and training. The RCDMC also helped to plan and organize the first CalTREX in June 2023, an event designed to train up prescribed fire practitioners through a week-long training workshop based on the Central Coast.

RCDMC staff, including Environmental Scientist Megan Barker and Stream Maintenance Program Manager Brandt Bates, also completed the first Monterey County Wildfire Resilience and Forest Health Public Works Plan (2022). This Plan covers all Coastal Zone areas in Monterey County to allow a faster, more streamlined process to obtain environmental analysis and coastal development permitting for vegetation management projects. We are excited to bring this tool forward to the residents of coastal zone areas as a potential option for getting critical forest health and fire resiliency work done in a more efficient manner.

The Los Padres Strategic Community Fuelbreak Collaborative Project- a California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) funded project- went forward with the hiring of Ventana Forestry to implement two projects under this grant- the Skinner Ridge/Bottcher's Gap fuelbreak maintenance and the East Pico Blanco shaded fuelbreak on private land. Both of these projects expect work to start in 2023. Additionally, the Rancho Rico Community Fuels Treatment is now being brought forward through our new PWP process and will be the first project in Monterey County that will utilize this tool.

Prescribed burners at the Nyland Ranch CCCPBA CALTREX 2023 lighting off the control line

The Carmel Valley Fuelbreak Project was awarded to the RCDMC from CAL FIRE for a total of approximately 3.26 million dollars to maintain strategic fuelbreaks around Carmel Valley and implement community fuels treatments in four different parts of the Valley. In addition, we are also analyzing two emergency egress options available for residents in neighborhoods with only one egress location.

The RCDMC is also working with the Coastal SLO RCD to develop a three-county finescale vegetation map (Monterey, San Benito and San Luis Obispo)

with assistance from the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) and experienced GIS firm, Tukman Geospatial. In addition, there will be multiple mapping products available to partner groups and the general public, including a variety of wildfire hazard spatial products, pervious and impervious surface mapping, fuel modelling and other datasets. This effort is funded partially by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW).

And finally, working with CSUMB, the RCDMC helped to fund a finescale vegetation map for Garland Park, a Monterey Peninsula Regional Parks District property, that details vegetation communities with incredible precision.

The Los Padres Strategic Community Fuelbreak Collaborative Project had some major milestones this year: work commenced on State Parks portions of the project, including invasive weed treatment in Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park and the beginning of some coastal prairie restoration in Andrew Molera State Park; we purchased a skid-steer masticator to help maintain fuelbreaks on San Clemente Rancho; work began on the Santa Lucia Preserve to implement their roadside vegetation treatments; 93 acres of fuelbreak maintenance work commenced on the Los Padres National Forest; and the CEQA Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration for the East Pico Blanco shaded fuelbreak was completed. Contact Jamie Tuitele-Lewis for more information

Oak and conifer woodland after a shaded fuelbreak treatment near Pico Blanco.

Other RCD News

RCDMC welcomes new team members

Audrey Garcia (left) joined RCDMC as the new Programs Assistant and Tony Tapia (right) joined RCDMC their bilingual Ag Field Tech.

RCDMC is grateful to welcome Tony Tapia and Audrey Garcia to our team. Tony joined the RCD as the new bilingual Ag Field Tech. After receiving his degree in Agricultural Plant and Soil Sciences from CSUMB, Tony accumulated years of experience working in the local agricultural industry with a special emphasis on insect and plant disease management. Audrey joined under a brand-new position with the RCD as Programs Assistant. After receiving her BA at SJSU in studio art, Audrey worked with the Santa Cruz Art League as their education coordinator creating and coordinating education programs and classes. She has over fifteen years' experience in administration and will be using her skillset to support RCD program leaders.

Fish Passage Barrier Removal Assistance

RCDMC Environmental Scientist Megan Barker provided permitting assistance for three voluntary fish passage projects with private landowners, Trout Unlimited and UC Hastings Reserve on Cachagua Creek, Potrero Creek, and Finch Creek, all to be constructed in fall 2023. RCDMC was awarded a second CDFW Fisheries Restoration Grant Program FRGP), with funding from Coastal Conservancy, for the third fish barrier removal project on Cachagua Creek. Watershed Program Manager Brandt Bates will be managing RCDMC's first FRGP and Coastal Conservancy funded fish passage project on Cachagua Creek. All of the fish passage projects would not be possible if it were not for the funding provided by the California Department of Fish

Male and female steelhead.

and Wildlife and Coastal Conservancy and the cooperation of local landowners and partners, who are working together to help improve migration and spawning habitat for federally threatened steelhead in the Carmel River Watershed.

Monterey County Permit Streamlining for Conservation Projects

RCDMC partnered with the Central Coast Wetlands Group, California Marine Sanctuary Foundation, Big Sur Land Trust, Elkhorn Slough Foundation and NRCS to streamline permitting of environmentally-beneficial projects with Monterey County Housing and Community Development. The goal of the permit program is to expedite the County permit application review process for environmentally beneficial projects, relieving the administrative burden for both the County and local conservation project proponents. This should also alleviate some of the time pressures that are inherent with grant funded projects. In November, RCDMC received support from the Monterey County Board of Supervisors to carry forward the permit streamlining effort through development of a master permit. The master permit program is being developed with funding support from State Water Resources Control Board and strategic guidance from Kelli Camara (Camara Consulting).

Pollinator Hedgerow Planting

Beneficial pollinator plant species with emphasis on narrowleaf milkweed were provided by the National Center for Appropriate Technology in 2021 to small local farms to establish hedgerows. Maintenance of these hedgerows in Monterey County continued through 2022 with Monarch habitat enhancement block grant funding through the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts. Hedgerow maintenance activities included mulching, hand weeding and weedwhacking, irrigation repair, and replacement planting. A generous local native plant enthusiast (Scott Hennessy) donated propagated narrowleaf milkweed for replacement planting. We are very grateful for his efforts. It is important to work towards enhancing habitat for beneficial pollinators and the Monarch butterfly to increase biodiversity and we are happy to continue with funding focusing on this specific effort.

Special Thanks to Our 2022 Sponsors

With your help we raised over $26,000!

Alliant Insurance Services, American Ag Credit, Braga Fresh, Burleson Consulting, California Utilities Service, Anonymous Farming-Families, Kennedy Ag-Green Rubber, Salinas Valley- Basin Ground Water Sustainability Agency, Henry Hibino Farms, JRG Attorneys at Law, Noland, Hamerly, Etienne & Hoss, Ocean Mist Farms, Pan- American, Silacci family, Sonsray Machinery, and Wilbur- Ellis.

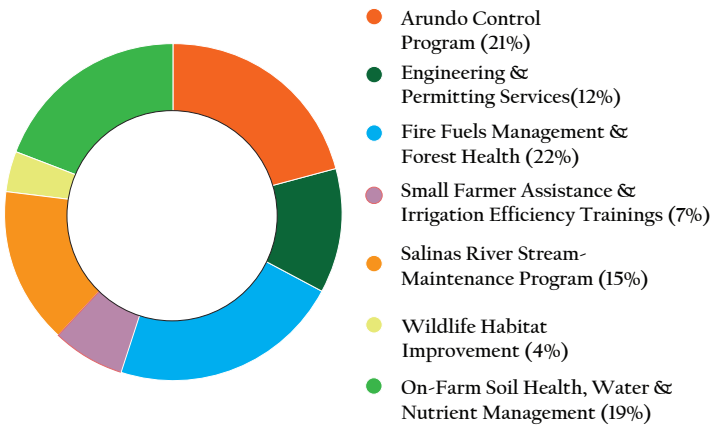
Summary of Financial Statements (July 2021 to June 2022)

Despite challenges of drought, 2022 was a 'steady as she goes' year for the RCD financially as we manage program-driven growth in project development and staff. We engaged new staff as well as a Grizzly Corps Fellow to support expansion of our bilingual farmer assistance, pollinator habitat and urban food production assistance programs. We continue to try to build on local funding sources through direct contracts with local agencies and private landowners and groups in order to reduce our dependence on grant funding while at the same time doing what we can to bring in state and federal funding to Monterey County to benefit our natural resources and economy. We are grateful for the growing support we've had from local private donations as we step up our outreach efforts and community members recognize our contribution towards Monterey County's abundance and beauty. We are particularly grateful to members of the Salinas River lands management community for their partnership and generosity in this respect. All donations to the RCD are tax-deductible and can be made directly or through donations of stock, thanks to the Community Foundation of Monterey County. Please contact Paul Robins to learn more or simply click the donate button here or on our website.

Expenses (per 2021-2022 audited reports)

Personnel	**$836,680**
Contract Service	**$1,543,680**
Office Expenses	**$26,214**
Project Permits	**$9,148**
Equipment & Field Supplies	**$24,455**
Vehicle & Travel	**$9,778**
Workshops, Meetings & Events	**$10,453**
Insurance	**$14,400**
Total:	**$2,474,808**

Income Sources (per 2021-2022 audited reports)

State grants	**$1,607,805**
Federal grants	**$315,208**
Local and Private Contracts	**$590,716**
Donations, Fundraising & Interest	**$34,502**
Total:	**$2,548,231**

RCDMC Programs by Relative Budget