

# Resource Conservation District of Monterey County

## Strategic Plan 2017-2022

(update approved 5/20/2021)

### **About Us**

*The Resource Conservation District of Monterey County was formally incorporated in 1994 from all of the Conservation Districts that had served the different regions of Monterey County since 1942. RCDMC and our predecessor Conservation Districts were initially formed to support voluntary conservation work combining local leadership with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service financial and technical assistance. Since the mid-1990's, RCDMC has added grant- and contract-funded professional staff to amplify and refine this service.*

*The mission of the RCD of Monterey County is to conserve and improve our natural resources, integrating the public interest in environmental protection with the needs of agricultural and urban users.*

*The RCD is guided by a 7-member Board of Directors who are appointed by the County Board of Supervisors to serve voluntarily and represent a broad spectrum of experience including farming, ranching, finance, and non-profit management. To support implementation of our mission, the RCD employs a 10-person staff with expertise including Agronomy, Botany, Civil Engineering, Ecology, Geographical Information Systems, Landscape Architecture, Plant Sciences and Soil Science. Our work is funded by project-based public and private grants and contracts.*

### **Our Approach/ Guiding Principles**

***Inclusion:*** *We believe that successful conservation depends on the inclusion, empowerment, and engagement of all members of our community, and that our organization should reflect the diversity of our community. We strive to encourage community dialogue and develop effective programs which promote a healthy environment and thriving communities.*

***Collaboration:*** *We work with land managers and with other local, state and federal partners to leverage our collective strengths in pursuit of shared goals.*

***Non-Regulatory:*** *We work with cooperating land managers and owners on a voluntary basis and are not regulatory. We honor the confidentiality concerns of our cooperators.*

***Objective, Scientific Approach:*** *Our work is rooted in and endeavors to contribute to current science and scientific understanding. We work realistically with cooperators within their operational and physical constraints.*

***Regional Partnership:*** *Natural resources are not constrained by county lines. We are good neighbors and work proactively with regional and state partners and coalitions to address our shared resource concerns. We share with and learn from our partners and bring cutting-edge conservation innovations to Monterey County.*

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**Equitability:** *We believe in the fair and just treatment of all members of our community. We endeavor to serve the entire community equitably, with emphasis on addressing unmet needs in the context of our mission.*

**Trust and Integrity:** *We are trusted because we treat others respectfully, and we conduct our work in an honest, ethical, and transparent manner.*

**Professionalism & Dependability:** *We hold ourselves to a professional standard of work and commit to meet the expectations of our customers, funders, and the public. We consistently seek to improve our quality of service and invite stakeholder feedback.*

### **Identified Goals and Strategies for Achieving Them 2017-2022**

*We endeavor to work and plan our work in a manner supportive of our mission and consistent with the Guiding Principles summarized above. We developed the Goals and strategies outlined here after consulting with community members and partner organizations through a survey and focus groups, and through a series of facilitated meetings of the RCD Board and Staff in 2016. The following goals & strategies (the Plan) serve as our touchstone for affirming progress and best serving our community. In order to be responsive to changes over time, we utilize this as a 'working document', which is reflected in this 2021 update to the Plan. Once COVID-19 Pandemic restrictions are lifted on public gatherings, we will initiate a formal, community engagement process for development of a Plan for 2023 and beyond.*

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***Goal 1: Salinas River programs continue to grow, and their collaborative model is expanded to other Monterey County Watersheds***

### **Strategies**

- Execute current watershed projects and increase landowner and other stakeholder support and engagement
- Continue to pursue funding for full implementation
- Streamline permitting agency requirements and approval processes
- Communicate the benefits of the Salinas River projects to the larger community
- Promote and participate in long-range planning for Salinas River
- Collaborate with Groundwater Sustainability Agency on planning and funding solutions

### **Desired Outcomes**

- Community is aware of the value of the Salinas River
- Salinas River flood risk is reduced
- RCD trusted by wildlife agencies, landowners and Salinas River communities
- Improved ecological and hydrologic function of local waterways

***Goal 2: Monterey County farmers and land managers/stewards work with the RCD to conserve water, soil, wildlife and other natural resources***

### **Strategies**

- Test strategies, techniques and technologies; participate in troubleshooting on projects useful to farmers of all scales
- Help extend/communicate current science to growers for adoption/integration into practices
- Execute Conservation Innovation Grant multi-farm project through 2021
- Continue Winter Erosion Control prevention assistance program
- Enhance/support NRCS capacity to deliver technical assistance and implement NRCS Cost-share contracts
- Connect farmers and eligible land managers with USDA resources/programs
- Bi-lingual irrigator, new farmer and farmworker trainings under CDFA Specialty Crop Block Grants, DWR Water Use Efficiency Program and other funding sources
- Continue supporting restoration project design and permitting through the Integrated Watershed Restoration Program
- Pursue partnerships, funding and projects to promote forest health and fire safety
- Collaborate with farmer service organizations for more comprehensive and consistent outreach to farmers of all scales, incorporating diverse modes of outreach to ensure equitable access to RCD information
- Strengthen existing and create new partnerships/networks/connections to broaden service

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- Participate in Groundwater Sustainability Agency technical/planning meetings to keep RCD engaged and in others' minds as venue for solutions
- Continue to expand non-ag conservation/ restoration work including fish passage permitting and restoration on non-ag parcels

### Desired Outcomes

- Improved habitat
- Improved productivity of the land
- More efficient and effective use of production inputs (fertilizer, energy, and water)
- Cleaner water
- Improved road safety
- Improved forest health/fire safety
- All relevant community members aware of our programs and services
- All areas and communities of county served equitably

***Goal 3: Monterey County growers are known as proactive, engaged, and efficient.***

### Strategies

- Partner with ag industry outreach efforts regarding conservation agriculture
- Document outcomes of irrigator trainings (video, website) and generate short-length videos for social media distribution
- Develop communications strategies to highlight growers' conservation and stewardship efforts to the general public
- Communicate with elected officials and regulatory agencies to showcase growers' conservation and stewardship practices
- Annual projects/farms tour in partnership with local businesses
- Engage with environmental and social justice groups to communicate about ag resource conservation work

### Desired Outcomes

- Monterey County residents learn the value of ag
- Better understanding between the agriculture community and the community at large

***Goal 4: Members of the community understand what the RCD does, what they can do to further conservation, and are inspired to help achieve our goals.***

### Strategies

- Develop a communications and outreach plan including key messages, target audiences, and detailed strategies
- Create a regular flow of information (new website, newsletters, events, social media)

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- Participate in other groups/organizations who share interests or goals so they see and incorporate RCD as partner for outreach
- Communicate to non-production ag professionals to increase their awareness of RCD and conservation issues
- Provide information to municipal residents about conservation practices
- Regularly inform public officials about RCD projects and growers' efforts
- Create opportunities for the public to experience on-farm conservation work through volunteer opportunities or demos
- Build and reinforce linkages with urban and coastal resource conservation needs and efforts
- Provide information to municipal residents about conservation practices
- Reach out to and authentically engage underrepresented groups for new work and as part of 2022 Strategic Plan development process
- Include community and partner information gathering (surveys and interviews) to inform 2022 Strategic Plan development process
- Collaborate with Center for Land-based Learning ag education FARMS Leadership Program
- Seek funding for RCD's role in program and ongoing ag education work by engaging the community in the success of the program and grant-writing
- Collaborate with other outdoor education efforts

### Desired Outcomes

- Monterey County residents understand their role in conservation
- Better stewardship of natural resources by residents throughout the county
- More support for the RCD and its programs
- Growers and community members know RCD staff and programs
- Monterey County students dream of working in ag and resource conservation
- The next generation of Monterey County farmers have conservation field experience before college

### ***Goal 5: The RCD has robust and diverse sources of revenue***

#### **Strategies**

- Create a business plan for sustainable revenue/program development and initiate implementation
- Continue to provide and develop services for hire (fee-for-service) such as for irrigation evaluations, permitting assistance, engineering and other services
- Diversify and enhance our individual and corporate fundraising through the business plan. Emphasize tax-deductible nature of contributions.

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### Desired Outcomes

- The RCD has stability to provide a consistent level of service
- The RCD has the flexibility to respond to community needs

***Goal 6: RCDMC functions as a model organization and workplace that maintains high-quality staff and provides expertise with a Board of Directors that is committed, effective & engaged.***

### Strategies

- Establish and convene a board development committee
- Develop a board orientation manual
- Develop a recruitment plan for new board members or associate directors that expands board diversity to reflect needed skills and community representation
- Develop systems for ensuring accountability
- Engage board in RCD work through committee structure and development of 'portfolios' where possible
- Conduct the 2022 Strategic Plan update to 'design in' routine board and community engagement
- Develop formal new employee onboarding protocols for orienting incoming staff
- Maintain competitive wages and benefits and a supportive and inclusive work environment
- Ensure staff have resources they need to conduct their work
- Balance Management duties among staff for professional development and succession planning
- Develop succession plan for staff and board to ensure growth and continuity
- Staff and board engaged in RCD mission together
- Complete development of better accounting and project management system

### Desired Outcomes

- All board members understand and embrace their roles and responsibilities to the RCD
- The board holds itself to a high standard of engagement.
- Highly-skilled and motivated staff are attracted and retained
- Staff are fulfilled in their work and represent the RCD positively
- Staff team is cohesive, creative, diverse and welcoming
- RCD maintains technically-skilled and socially-adept team that is engaged and committed to RCD function