

# ANNUAL REPORT

2016



**RESOURCE  
CONSERVATION  
DISTRICT**  
Greater San Diego County



# 2016 Annual Report

## Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County

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The Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County (RCD) is a non-enterprise Special District organized under Division 9 of the California State Public Resources code. We are tasked with voluntary natural resources conservation on public and private lands.

The RCD's boundaries encompass a service area of approximately 2,886 square miles or 1,847,300 acres. The District's northern boundary extends into the Bonsal community, the southern boundary extends to the United States-Mexico border, the western boundary extends to the Pacific Ocean and the eastern boundary extends to the Imperial County line.

The highly varied topography of this service area consists of more than thirty types of vegetative communities and encompasses mountains, deserts, forest, and coastal resources, including ten varied and distinct watersheds with streams, rivers, sloughs, lakes, beaches, and bays, as well as urban, agricultural, and suburban areas.

The population of San Diego County is dense with 3.18 million people and includes the largest amount of small farms (6,687) in America. It is also the 5th highest populated county and the 19th largest agricultural economy in the U.S.

All RCD programs, as well as other valuable natural resource information, are promoted on our website and our Facebook page.

**OUR MISSION:**  
TO HELP PEOPLE PROTECT,  
CONSERVE, AND RESTORE  
NATURAL RESOURCES  
THROUGH EDUCATION,  
INFORMATION, AND TECHNICAL  
ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS.

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### Executive Summary

2016 was a year of growth in every way for the Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County. Many of the goals and potential projects that we have been pursuing over time came to fruition this year, bringing in more funding and exciting new projects. In addition, our existing programs continue to thrive and adapt to the changing needs of our constituents. RCD's network of partners and collaborators is expanding all the time, allowing us to be more flexible and dynamic in the support we offer the residents of San Diego County.



This year saw the official launch of our Foundation, The Resource Conservation Foundation of Greater San Diego, a non-profit 501(c)(3) created to support and expand the programs and capabilities of the Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County (RCDGSDC). The Mission of the RCDGSDC and its Foundation is to protect, conserve, and restore our county's natural resources through educational and technical assistance in

all areas of natural resource management. With its non-profit status, the Foundation allows us more flexibility in pursuing funding opportunities. Diversifying our funding sources will enable us to better serve our community and to bring greater conservation benefits to San Diego County.

We hosted a successful Open House for our local legislators and partners in 2016. It was a wonderful opportunity to share our priorities and successes with community leaders and valued partners. The event was well attended and focused on San Diego's tree devastation from the Kuroshio and Polyphagus shot hole borer beetles, as well as the Goldspotted oak borer beetle. Our executive director has become very involved in this tree beetle epidemic that is having devastating effects in San Diego County.

2016 brought some changes to our Board of Directors, as well as additional staff members. Our Board continues to evolve as we add new members and associate members with specific skill sets and partnerships that help us advance our mission. As our program load continues to grow, we added two staff members: a Fire Safe Council Coordinator and a Program Coordinator.

We overhauled our Fire Safe Council website, which has been widely praised among its users. The new site was designed as a "one stop shop" for San Diego residents looking for information about Fire Safe Councils and fire resources in SD County. A new website is in the works for the RCD as well.

Please read on to learn more about our priority programs in 2016 . . .

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## Tijuana River Valley Community Garden

We got some great news in 2016 – our long-standing dream of expanding the garden became a reality! With generous funding from the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) and the San Diego County Board of Supervisors, we began planning and executing the garden expansion this year. The demand from local residents for more gardening space is high, demonstrated by over 170 people on the waiting list. We are meeting this demand by creating seventy-two new garden plots and installing six quarter-acre plots to be used as demonstration sites and incubator farms. We expect new gardeners to move onto their plots in spring of 2017.

Our community events were also a big success this year. We held two community clean-up days this year: one in May as a part of the county-wide Creek to Bay Clean-up, and the other in September as a part of the International Coastal Clean-up Day. Both events were well attended by the garden community and local residents.

We held the 2nd Annual Soil Shindig in partnership with our farming neighbors, Suzie's Farm and Wild Willow Farm and Education Center. This year's event built on the success of last year's: we estimate that 400-500 people attended and over thirty organizations and businesses participated through workshops, vendor / informational booths, cooking demonstrations, key note speakers' panel, and more. We are grateful to the County Supervisors and all our partners for their support of this event.

We continue to work with great community volunteers such as our Master Composter, who has donated hundreds of volunteer hours to maintain our communal compost bins at the garden. This



year, we also developed some new relationships with local colleges and universities. We hosted a group of horticulture students from Southwestern College who came down for a visit to learn about the garden and, in return, spent a couple of hours clearing an abandoned plot. We also teamed up with engineering students at UCSD who took on a project to design a prototype of a floodplain friendly gathering space for the garden.

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## Watershed Education Program

In partnership with the Port of San Diego, this program teaches students about watersheds – how they become polluted and what we as individuals can do to make a difference. Students are introduced to common non-point source pollutants and the effects they have on San Diego waterways and marine life. In 2016, the program reached 2,460 second, fifth and sixth grade students through ninety-two presentations at twenty-six schools within the San Diego Bay Watershed.



This is what the teachers are saying about our watershed education:

*“(The program) provides awareness of effects on our immediate environment.”*

*“Instructor was clear. Program was comprehensive.”*

*“Hands-on and the model is a good visual for students.”*

Participating students complete pre- and post-tests to enable us to assess their learning. On their post-test, 5th and 6th grade students are asked to report one new thing they learned. Here are some of their responses:

*“I learned what should and should not go into the ocean, how to keep things from going into the ocean, and learned how to keep my community clean.” –Adam R.*

*“I learned what nonpoint pollution is!” –Angel M.*

*“I learned that a watershed is an area of land that is connected with rivers, lakes, and ponds which go into the ocean.” –Victor F.*

*“I learned that we can make a difference!” –Talon*

*“I learned that littering can create a lot of pollution in the streets, the ocean, etc. and we can all help by throwing all the trash we use where it belongs, in the trashcan. We can also make a big difference by buying non-chemical/toxic soap or detergent.” –Ashley R.*

*“I learned that keeping water clean and keeping the land clean can help our animals a lot.” –Caelan S.*

*“It’s better to wash your car in a car wash and not in your driveway.” –Sunny G.*

*“The one new thing I learned is that all the trash goes to the storm drain when it rains.” –Zakai C.*

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## School Gardens

This year, the RCD joined with other organizations supporting school gardens to form the San Diego County School Garden Collaborative. The aim of the collaborative is to support and advance garden-based learning for all youth in San Diego County by offering training, networking, and resources to teachers and garden educators. With the collaborative we have started surveying schools on their garden needs, and we delivered a series of professional development workshops to teachers in the Clairemont area.

Our annual plant giveaway, generously supported by Altman Plants in Vista, was held on March 10, 2016. About 2,300 vegetable and herb seedlings were given to 192 participants. The plants were distributed from four sites across the County.

The RCD continues to distribute an email newsletter to teachers and other garden contacts across the county to share information about training, resources, funding opportunities, and other items of interest to school gardens.



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## Milkweed for Monarchs / USFWS Grant

This year, we have strengthened and formalized our partnerships around pollinator habitat and protection by creating the San Diego Pollinator Alliance. Through this Alliance, we are working collaboratively with five other agencies and organizations to develop demonstration pollinator gardens across the county and educate residents how they can replicate this habitat at home. This year, a pollinator demonstration garden was installed at Sikes Adobe and the demonstration garden at the San Diego County Fair was enhanced. Three more gardens will be installed in 2017.



The RCD participated in the County Fair again this year, with staff taking shifts at the pollinator demonstration garden throughout June. The aim of our exhibit is to raise awareness of the importance of pollinators and how individuals can support pollinators by creating habitat using native plants.

In addition to this outreach effort, we have also given presentations to garden clubs, schools, and scout groups on the importance of pollinators and how we can attract and support them in our gardens. We also attended several community events to promote pollinators and shared hundreds of native milkweed and wildflower seed packs.

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## Scholarships

The RCD's annual Conservation Scholarship program offers scholarships of \$1,000 to graduating high school seniors in San Diego County who are going on to college to study an environmental or conservation related field. This year the RCD received twenty applications and awarded five scholarships.

The RCD also sponsors student opportunities to attend the California Society of Range Management's summer Range Camp. The camp offers high school students a hands on experience of rangeland and natural resource management as well as an introduction to career paths in conservation. Students have the opportunity to shadow university and career professionals throughout the week of camp activities. In 2016 we received five applications and sponsored one student to travel to and attend camp. We also facilitated the sponsorship of two students by the Southern California Baja Region of RCDs, of which we are a member, to attend Range Camp.



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## Carbon Farming

In 2016, the RCD began exploring its role to support Carbon Farming – farming practices that sequester greenhouse gases. We participated in conference calls and workshops to inform ourselves about the topic and better understand how we can collaborate with partners in San Diego County to contribute to the great work being done by RCDs in across the state. The work we did in 2016 laid the groundwork for us to receive funding in 2017 to develop the first carbon farm plan in Southern California.

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## Fire Safe Council of San Diego County

The RCD works in partnership with the Fire Safe Council of San Diego County (FSCSDC) to manage its programs and grants. 2016 was a very productive year and showed a steady increase from 2015 with our fire prevention services.

### **Chipping Program:**

In 2016, our fuel reduction work successfully cleared approximately 2,662 acres of vegetation from private property and high fire risk areas in San Diego County. We assisted nearly 240 properties with grant-funded fuel reduction programs, including our No-Cost Chipping Program and Defensible Space Assistance Program for residents in need of extra help to meet compliance standards.

Additionally, we support the local Fire Safe Councils with promotion of their fuels programs, such as community chipping days and dead tree removal, within the county.



***Defensible Space Assistance Program (DSAP):***

DSAP offers low income seniors and disabled residents of San Diego County a service to create 100’ of defensible space around their homes to reduce fire danger. We contract with local businesses that are familiar with terrain and the communities to carry out this work. A majority of our work was contracted with the East County Transitional Living Center, a non-profit organization that provides hope and a hand-up to homeless and other individuals/families in need, by assisting them into independent, self-sustained living through case-managed transitional programs. Their Brush Management Program provides a crew trained and experienced in creating and maintaining defensible space. This year our DSAP program reached twenty-one participants and treated nearly one hundred acres of property.



***Education Program:***

The FSCSDC facilitates a day-long fire behavior workshop called Fire Operations in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). The class is taught by JP Harris, retired LA County battalion chief, and held in partnership with community FSCs and Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT). This year, WUI workshops were hosted in in the communities of Palomar Mountain, Jacumba, Alpine, and Chula Vista and attended by eighty-five community members.

***Fire Safe Council Bi-Monthly Meetings:***

The FSDSDC holds bi-monthly meetings where representatives from federal, state, and local fire agencies come together with members of community Fire Safe Councils to exchange information and discuss wildfire-related issues. On average, these meetings bring together more than thirty community members per meeting. In 2016 we proudly welcomed three new Fire Safe Councils to San Diego County: Palomar Mountain FSC, Intermountain FSC, and Poway FSC, bringing the county-wide total to thirty-seven.

Through a grant from the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, we were able to further extend our community outreach by creating an electronic newsletter that reached 133 subscribers and continuously grows. This grant also allowed to reach rural and absentee landowners by attending community events like the Farm Bureau Expo, Department of Homeland Security Fair, Viejas Earth Day, CA FSC Wildfire Community Preparedness Day, and the Scripps Ranch Community Preparedness Expo.

***Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP):***

This year, the FSCSDC approved two CWPPs – Community Wildfire Protection Plans. These documents were required through the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) of 2003 and are mandatory for acquiring USFS grant funding.

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## Looking Toward the Future

Thank you for taking the time to learn more about the RCD of Greater San Diego County and our programs and priorities. As you can see, 2016 was a very productive year for our organization. We look forward to doing even more in 2017!

The RCD has reached out to other like-minded agencies this past year to develop community recognition and assist with programs that help support our long-range goals and to assist San Diegans. We continue to build on these relationships, and we will become more engaged with our County Supervisors, legislatures, and other state, local, federal and tribal governmental agencies in 2017 to further our sphere of influence and to promote conservation practices.

As always, we would love to hear your thoughts and opinions on how we can improve our programs and goals. Remember, your tax deductible donations help with all of these great programs as well. Please give us a call if you would like to make a donation to the RCD.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Board and our dedicated staff,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sheryl Landrum". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sheryl Landrum, Executive Director

## RCD Board of Directors

Don Butz  
Jordan Gascon  
Marilyn Huntamer  
Nadine Scott  
Kurt Streule  
Jim Thompson

### ***Associate Directors***

Alexander Balkin  
Jo MacKenzie  
D.K. Nasland

## RCD Staff Members

Sheryl Landrum – Executive Director  
Ann Baldrige – Program Manager  
Chris Kelley – Financial Coordinator  
Chandra Richards – Conservation Ecologist  
Kristin Baker -- Forestry Tech  
Chris Foran – Development and Communication  
Kaylie Caires – Program Coordinator  
Britney Munoz – Community Outreach Specialist & FSC Coordinator  
Kyle Merker – Program Assistant  
Vince DiMaggio – Program Assistant



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