

San Mateo Resource Conservation District

Strategic Plan 2021-2024

Adopted February 18, 2021

Our Mission

San Mateo Resource Conservation District is a local hub for conservation, helping the people of San Mateo County build a more thriving natural environment for all.

Our Vision

Coastal San Mateo County will be environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable.

The Need

People who live, work, or play in coastal San Mateo County know this is a special place. We are inspired by its abundance and beauty, including natural and working lands from the tops of redwood-forested mountains to the majestic coastline and beaches of the Pacific Ocean. We depend on its healthy soils, clean air, water resources, and ecosystems to sustain our health, economy, and way of life. How we manage these resources directly affects biodiversity, public safety, equity and justice, diverse industries, and our personal fulfillment.

There have been significant investments to preserve, restore, and care for these places that care for us. Nonetheless, we face grave threats and significant challenges, including climate change, species extinction, water pollution, catastrophic wildfire, historic drought, flooding, sea level rise, harsh inequity and injustice. Not surprisingly, the same forces that threaten plant and animal species also threaten human lives and livelihoods.

The San Mateo RCD will answer this call to action. We must ambitiously, courageously, and effectively meet the pace and the scale of today's environmental challenges and directly confront their nexus to equity and justice. This strategic plan will guide us to solutions as the RCD works from our base of strength and competency to become the organization our community needs.

The Opportunity

The San Mateo Resource Conservation District is up to the challenge. With a deep understanding of the people and the lands of San Mateo County rooted in more than eighty years of service, the RCD provides comprehensive, integrated services that continuously evolve to address community needs and priorities. Current priorities are:

- Wildlife. San Mateo County is a hotspot of biological diversity and home to more than 40 species of plants and animals at risk of extinction. Our services restore ecosystems and habitat with a focus on species at risk of becoming extinct.

- Water. Water is one of the most significant resources shaping the future of California. Our services improve water conservation, water resource management, and water quality to help ensure clean and reliable water for fish and wildlife, farms, and people.
- Climate. Our work removes greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, reduces emissions, and builds resilience to extreme weather conditions for wildlife and the community
- Agriculture. Agriculture is at the heart of coastal San Mateo County. Our work helps ensure viable local agriculture while also helping farmers and ranchers be environmental stewards of the lands they manage.
- Wildfire. Wildfires are a serious threat in our region. Our work helps reduce the risk of catastrophic fire, improve forest health, and heal the land after fire does occur.

The RCD in San Mateo County is one of nearly 100 conservation districts in California, and about 3,000 across the United States- in nearly every county nationwide. These districts serve as local hubs for conservation, connecting people with the technical, financial, and educational assistance they need to conserve and manage natural resources. RCDs work directly with landowners and other interests to ensure the resilience and health of water resources, soils, wildlife habitat, and more. Conservation districts coordinate assistance from all available sources—public and private, local, state, and federal—to develop locally-driven solutions to natural resource concerns.

RCDs are uniquely positioned as an extremely nimble form of local government that has the benefits of government accountability to the communities we serve, while retaining the flexibility and function of nonprofit organizations.

- RCDs exist to *help people* help the land. We work as an invited neutral party on a voluntary basis aiming for win-win solutions—a key reason we are a trusted resource in the communities we serve.
- RCDs were designed to evolve with changing needs to support thriving communities, landscapes, and economies. In recent years this has enabled the San Mateo RCD to bring resources and solutions for flooding, drought, fire, and climate change.
- RCDs are able to work readily with private and public landowners, tenants and land managers, tribes, federal, state, or local governments, non-profits, advocates, and farmers and ranchers alike. In this way we work across political and economic divides to bring essential programs and financial resources to provide benefits at scale to our community.
- RCDs are locally relevant. We address community priorities and are led by local, publicly appointed boards of directors. RCD directors are constituents and neighbors, readily accessible to the communities we serve and living the local issues.
- RCDs collaborate with each other and other organizations regionally and statewide to achieve large-scale conservation objectives.

With a deep understanding of the landscapes and people of San Mateo County grounded in more than 80 years of service, we bring science-based solutions to environmental concerns. We provide services across jurisdictions and across public and private lands, accomplishing boots-on-the-ground environmental protection at property, landscape, and regional scales.

Using very diverse tools, our work takes many forms:

- Technical assistance from experts such as hydrologists, engineers, biologists, foresters, and soil scientists
- Implementing projects such as providing chipping and hauling services to help neighborhoods reduce wildfire risk, removing a dam to restore migration for endangered salmon, constructing a wildlife-friendly flood control project across multiple properties, and helping farmers upgrade water infrastructure to maximize conservation
- Trusted broker coordinating across jurisdictions and land ownerships, leveraging local, state, federal, and private funding
- Outreach and education on a wide range of issues of community concern such as bilingual workshops for farmworkers about irrigation water conservation, workshops for equipment operators to learn best practices to protect forests, outreach to pet owners regarding water pollution from pet waste, and assisting the County with outreach regarding sea level rise
- Financial assistance via grants, cost-share programs, and other resources for RCD staff, partner organizations, and contractors to directly benefit the community

To bring these services to our community, we rely on our organizational strengths.

- We bring people together and create trust with diverse stakeholders.
- We provide reliable, science-based technical expertise.
- We leverage our funding. The San Mateo RCD leverages a small property tax base to bring diverse public and private funds. Over five years (FY16-FY20), each dollar of property taxes paid by constituents leveraged between \$37 and \$152 of primarily state and federal grants.
- We maintain an intentional and extraordinary organizational culture. We are:

Passionate and dedicated. Members of our staff and board are devoted to our mission, focused on our customers, and fully engaged in our work.

Creative, courageous, and adaptive. We lead with vision not constraints. We are resourceful and forward thinking, always seeking solutions. We take risks, make mistakes, learn, and respond.

Learners. We are a community of learners that embraces training, professional development and innovation. We learn from diverse types of expertise and wisdom.

Trusting and trustworthy. We trust each other to work independently and in supportive teams. We hold ourselves accountable to each other and to the community. We make space for courageous, real, vulnerable, and uncomfortable conversations that build trust.

Empathetic. We invest in relationships. We listen to each other, treat each other with kindness, and understand what it means to be human and interdependent. We support each other during difficult times. Our whole selves are welcome at the RCD.

Fun. We bring a sense of humor and don't mind being goofy or whimsical as part of our whole selves doing important work.

Goals, Outcomes and Strategies

Together with our partners across the community, we are working towards a future where:

1. The land and communities of San Mateo County are healthy and resilient in the face of climate change and other impacts.
2. The connection between people and the land is strong.
3. People throughout our community equitably share the benefits of and connection to our natural resources.
4. San Mateo RCD offers strong, stable leadership to help reach our vision.
5. San Mateo RCD models a diverse, inclusive, strengths-based culture.

Goal #1: The land and communities of San Mateo County are healthy and resilient in the face of climate change and other impacts.

Outcomes:

- Our watersheds provide clean and reliable water, healthy soils, intact habitats, and other ecosystem services in which both people and wildlife thrive. Little restoration work remains to be done and the stewardship of natural resources focuses on adaptive management.
- Local farms and ranches are productive and economically viable while contributing to environmental solutions and food security.
- Natural resources are managed to build community and ecosystem resilience to cycles of fire, flooding, drought and other extremes.

Strategies:

- 1.1. Implement programs and projects to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire, heal the land after catastrophic fire does occur, and to utilize fire beneficially.
- 1.2. Implement programs and projects that help our landscapes adapt to climate change by building resilience to flooding, drought and other climate extremes.
- 1.3. Plan, design, and implement activities that restore, protect, or monitor healthy watershed and ecosystem function.
- 1.4. Work to remove barriers to accomplishing restoration and stewardship at the pace and scale needed for a healthy environment.

- 1.5. Provide technical assistance and incentives tailored to diverse constituents to adopt practices that conserve water, soil, habitats, and other natural resources and mitigate climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions or sequestering carbon.
- 1.6. Provide technical assistance, participate in collaborations, and implement programs and projects towards a resilient food system.

Goal #2: The connection between people and the land is strong.

Outcomes:

- Our community shares widespread empowerment and understanding of how to live and work in harmony with our local ecosystems.
- Everyone in our community has access to the knowledge, information, tools, and confidence needed to sustainably manage natural resources.
- Stewardship is a collaborative effort by those who relate to the land in different ways - from farmers and ranchers to urban residents, from those whose ancestors called these lands home to recent arrivals, from students to business owners to farmworkers, from nonprofit organizations to government agencies.

Strategies:

- 2.1. Increase the knowledge, ability, and confidence of diverse constituents to steward natural resources.
- 2.2. Provide access to information and tools for diverse constituents to be able to confidently manage natural resources sustainably.
- 2.3. Inform community leaders about natural resource challenges and invite their input and participation in solutions.

Goal #3: People throughout our community equitably share the benefits of and connection to our natural resources.

Outcomes:

- Our stewardship ethic includes a commitment to the health and well-being of all people.
- Everyone benefits from the economic, social, and environmental benefits of our lands.
- We recognize the diversity in our community, and we see the strengths and gifts that each member of the community brings to the shared work of deep sustainability.

Strategies:

- 3.1. Engage the board and staff in shared learning and dialogue around diversity, equity, and inclusion and the impacts of systemic racial and social inequity.
- 3.2. Expand engagement with under-represented communities to understand how the RCD can partner to reach shared goals.
- 3.3. Develop a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion plan for the RCD.

Goal #4: San Mateo RCD offers strong, stable leadership to help reach our vision.

Outcomes:

- The RCD is widely known and a primary resource for addressing environmental concerns.
- The RCD has stable funding that allows its staff and board to focus on both the day-to-day work of helping community members, and long-term strategy and innovation to ensure San Mateo County thrives environmentally, economically, and socially.
- The RCD has the staffing, systems, and other resources it needs to provide excellent and innovative service and retain a skilled and talented team.

Strategies:

- 4.1. Develop and execute a strategic communications plan to raise awareness of the RCD so that people who live, own or manage land, or work in the county know who and what the RCD is, and how to engage with the RCD.
- 4.2. Pursue opportunities to increase RCD baseline funding in perpetuity to a level that supports the core operations and staff.
- 4.3. Maintain and increase diversity of revenue sources, potentially including public and private grants, private donations, corporate contributions, fees charged for services, and others as appropriate.
- 4.4. Maintain and continue improvements to administrative systems that reflect and support the organization the RCD has become and support succession planning.
- 4.5. Document / add to succession planning activities for the Executive Director and other key roles.
- 4.6. Ensure compensation, benefits, and workplace culture that attract and retain high quality professionals.
- 4.7. Through direct hiring, partnerships with other organizations, and professional development, ensure the RCD has the appropriate staffing and skill sets to meet the goals in the strategic plan.
- 4.8. Continue to develop the board's capacity.

Goal #5: San Mateo RCD models a diverse, inclusive, strengths-based culture.

Outcomes:

- The RCD team (board and staff) is representative of our community and we foster full inclusion of people of all backgrounds and identities.
- The stability and effectiveness of the RCD are supported by the continued empowerment of all staff members to act as leaders within the organization.

- The RCD board brings skills, knowledge, resources, connections and passion to its oversight and promotion of the RCD.

Strategies:

- 5.1. Continue and expand hiring and management best practices including those that foster diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- 5.2. Create a strategic board recruitment plan that includes approaches to building a wider circle of leaders who can move into board positions as they become available and focuses on building authentic connections to diverse community members.
- 5.3. Build authentic connections between the RCD and diverse community members, building a wider circle of potential partners and leaders for the organization.
- 5.4. Support the learning and empowerment of all staff and board members through access to internal and external training and development activities.
- 5.5. Foster a supportive work culture in which effective conservation leadership flourishes.
- 5.6. Promote a work environment that minimizes the risk of stress and burnout among staff members.