

# ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020



CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF  
**RESOURCE**  
CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

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CONSERVATION DISTRICTS**



## Who We Are

The California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD) is a 501c3 non-profit organization dedicated to supporting California's working landscapes, communities, and economies. Our members are from the 96 Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) located throughout the state. CARCD and RCDs work with state, local, and federal agencies, policy makers, and citizens to ensure the resilience and health of California's water, forests, soil, wildlife habitat, and other natural resources – today and for generations to come.

## Our Mission

The mission of the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts is to connect, serve, and champion the statewide network of resource conservation districts.

- We link RCDs in a strong, mutually supportive network working towards shared goals and resources.
- We provide training, tools and expertise to help RCDs achieve excellence.
- We showcase the relevance of RCDs and make their work visible to elected officials, conservation leaders and the community at large.

## Our Vision

California's Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) are uniquely empowered to bring partners from every sector together to help our communities care for the land, air, water, and wildlife of our state. In serving these vital organizations, the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD) strives to support a healthy, resilient California for everyone.

Our vision is that every Resource Conservation District has the support, leadership, and capacity to help tackle our toughest natural resource issues by working in partnership with all members of the community.





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# Message from Our Executive Director

Dear RCD Family,

What a year... and, yet, what a year! In spite of everything, the RCD community didn't miss a beat - just picked up and kept going. The pandemic hit and you focused on feeding people and taking care of your staff. Racial violence was exposed, and you asked how you could do better and make a difference. Fires hit and you jumped in to serve your communities, redirecting every last resource to recovering strong. You have accomplished some amazing things and been of service to your community in new and stronger ways. I am always so humbled and honored to be among such tough, resourceful, and dedicated people.

The way you came together was inspiring; meeting regularly as a community to support each other through these tough and challenging times. Helping each other find the rudder that would help steer the course; opening up your books, grant applications, and staff manuals to make sure that no one had to reinvent the wheel. You are the true definition of how a rising tide floats all boats. You were there for each other.

I am also personally thankful to you. This was a tough year for all of us. But it was your inspiration that kept my year together. Seeing what was possible and coming together around these challenges has given me a safe space and refuge to be among friends, to remember what I am fighting for, and to have the motivation to work forward. Thank you for being part of this RCD family and doing the work that is so critical to our communities.

As we look at the wildfires and the other chaos from this year, it is increasingly apparent why we need RCDs. We need people on the ground who see the challenges, have the connections to bring resources to bear, and the trust of their communities to make change happen. This is the change we need, on the ground, fighting to make California a better place one acre at a time....one community at a time....one County at a time....one State at a time.

## CARCD Board of Directors

**DON BUTZ**  
President

**HAROLD SINGER**  
Vice President

**PHIL SCHOEFER**  
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District Manager, Northern Region

**KELLYX NELSON**  
District Manager, Central Region

**MANDY PARKES**  
District Manager, Southern Region

We need RCDs to help landowners prepare for wildfire so they are ready when it hits, and to help them recover stronger after it ends. We need RCDs to repair a stream bank so that soil does not erode into critical salmon breeding grounds. We need RCDs to create community gardens and food banks, and to provide a place for people to grow fruits and vegetables in food deserts. We need RCDs to help farmers conserve water and soil, so they can keep their costs and impacts low. We need RCDs to help develop markets and drive innovation to keep the farm economy strong. We need RCDs to educate kids, sometimes taking them into nature for the first time and sparking a passion for and a belonging in the natural world. We need the strength and resilience of the RCDs to build and serve our communities, our natural world, and our agricultural community. RCDs are essential.

That is why CARCD continues to fight for you. It is this vision that CARCD centers its work around. We serve you so that you can serve your community. Anything we can do to make your work just a little easier is our critical focus. We see how hard it is to keep the RCD running every day, but we also see how critical you are to tackling challenges that are unique to us. In this report you will see the incremental steps we take each day to support you in making change happen. From pass-through grant funds to walking the halls in Sacramento, all of it is done in the spirit of service to our RCD community- the amazing people that make up the RCD family around the State. It is an honor and a privilege to be able to support you.

Please let us know what you find helpful and what can be changed to meet your needs. We are here for you both in this challenging time and when the bright clear skies eventually return- because they always do.

Sincerely,



Karen Buhr

## CARCD Staff

**KAREN BUHR**  
Executive Director

**SARA SCHREMMER**  
Deputy Director

**EMILY SUTHERLAND**  
Office Manager

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**HILLARY SARDINAS**  
Pollinators Project Manager

**SARA LETTON**  
Project Coordinator

**NANCY WAHL-SCHEURICH**  
Project Coordinator

**KIKO BARR**  
Outreach Coordinator





MAKING AN  
IMPACT

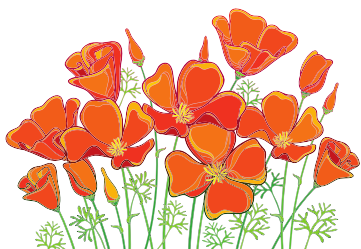
# Advocacy Highlights

CARCD invests in political advocacy to support member RCDs, and to advance the unique role RCDs can play in solving California's natural resource challenges. By partnering with Pacific Policy Group (PPG), CARCD maintains regular communications and coordination with key legislative and agency contacts.



"I really appreciate CARCD taking the lead on investigating advocacy requests. As special districts, we want to be careful and deliberate about where we invest our time and support, and we rely on the CARCD leadership and non-profit status for scrutiny and guidance regarding the requests that come our way."

Megan McCluer, Mendocino County RCD



2019 CARCD/PPG advocacy highlights include the following:

- Co-sponsored SB 253 (Dodd) with The Nature Conservancy to create a state program at CDFA analogous to USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), which would provide incentives for implementing on-farm conservation practices. While the bill did not pass, the concept was in the Governor's climate bond proposal.
- Helped pass SB 474 (Stern) to extend to 2030 the Habitat Conservation Fund, which provides \$30 million a year from the General Fund for habitat projects.
- Supported budget efforts to appropriate \$6 million for fire prevention and community preparedness efforts that RCDs can help implement.
- Led budget effort that resulted in a \$5 million defensible space program through CA Natural Resources Agency
- Influenced multiple climate resilience proposals to specifically mention RCDs as program implementers
- Coordinated RCD testimony in Assembly Natural Resources Committee and Assembly Local Government joint hearing on improving fire prevention.
- Supported and engaged on more than ten bills that covered watershed restoration, forest health and fire prevention, supporting agriculture, and creating natural resource funding.

# Member Highlights

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72

RCDS paid membership dues

OVER  
\$650  
THOUSAND

GRANT FUNDS acquired by CARCD and distributed to 37 RCDs-

10

FEDERAL GRANTS totalling over \$620,000

7

STATE GRANTS totalling over \$350,000

11

FOUNDATION GRANTS totalling over \$700,000

\$38  
THOUSAND

FUNDRAISED

Assisted RCDs with Fundraising through website template and training, resulted in \$38,000 raised to date-

Created a RCD website template that meets Senate Bill 929 requirements for special districts

## 2019 Conference Highlights

- Over 250 Attendees & 26 Sponsors
- 100+ Speakers/Presenters over 3 days
- Over 30 technical assistance providers participated in the all-day Soil Health Workshop







BUILDING  
CAPACITY  
AND  
INCREASING  
EQUITY



With generous support from private and public funders, CARCD has developed a robust capacity building program over the past several years that aims to increase the impact and sustainability of CARCD, build the capacity of individual RCDs, and increase the reach and influence of the RCD statewide network.

In 2019, CARCD continued this program through the following efforts:

- Durable Collaborations - CARCD facilitated the formation of 3 regional Durable Collaborations: North Coast (8 RCDs), Sacramento Valley (10 RCDs), and the Central Coast Durable Collaboration (4 RCDs.) Durable Collaborations promote coordination and resource sharing among RCDs in the pursuit of grant funding and comprehensive conservation work at a regional level. The North Coast Durable Collaboration successfully applied and were funded as a region for the Department of Conservation's Forest Health Watershed Coordinator program.

- CARCD Board and Staff Development Training
  - In December of 2019, CARCD gathered for a 1.5 day off-site retreat led by the Center for Diversity and the Environment to focus on DEI issues
  - In early February 2020, the CARCD Board of Directors gathered for a 1.5 day off-site retreat led by the Center for Diversity and the Environment to focus on DEI issues
  - In late February 2020, CARCD board and staff came together with Solid Ground consulting to hold a 1.5 day off-site retreat to develop the new CARCD Strategic Plan for 2021-2023





PROGRAM  
FOCUS  
AREAS

## Forest Health

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- Regional Conservation Partnership Program for Tree Mortality - CARCD partnered with nine RCDs to offer forestry technical assistance to nonindustrial private forest owners. Funded through USDA NRCS, this program provides technical and financial assistance to assist landowners affected by the Sierra Nevada tree mortality crisis.
- Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program – Funded by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, CARCD assessed the forestry capacity of six RCDs in the Tahoe Central Sierra Initiative Plus region. This assessment informed the development of a training series focused on building forest management and fire resilience capacity in the region.
- Strengthened Partnerships – CARCD has strengthened partnerships with CAL FIRE and the Sierra Nevada Conservancy to promote landscape-level forest management. CARCD regularly participates in the CA Forest Management Taskforce subcommittees on tree mortality and landowner engagement.

## Soil Health

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- RCD Technical Trainings: CARCD was able to begin the carbon farm network expansion and elevate the RCDs' technical capacity to implement carbon farm plans. We achieved this by co-hosting two carbon farm planning trainings with the Carbon Cycle Institute (CCI) and local RCDs. These were each held in different ecoregions and cropping systems to acknowledge the diversity of the state. \$3,000 in stipends and scholarships were provided to RCDs. The workshops provided trainings to 97 people from 40 organizations.
  - Soil Health Summit 2019. CARCD co-hosted a Soil Health Terrace (previously Summit) with the East Stanislaus RCD at Ross Ranch in Redding. This training highlighted facilitation techniques, soil health data collecting & monitoring, & a ranch tour. The Soil Health Terrace was a success & highly praised for its outdoor, hands-on approach to training.
- Carbon Farm Hubs: CCI & CARCD collaborated on fostering hubs of RCDs to create regional carbon farm programs. Seven hubs, encompassing 33 RCDs have emerged and have assessed and analyzed their collective needs. CARCD, CCI, and the RCD hubs are currently engaging in a collaborative funding process to bring the programs to fruition.
- CARCD applied to grant programs, created relationships with two private foundations and were awarded three grants totaling \$350,000.
- A highlight of CARCD's 2019 carbon farming work includes our new relationship with Zero Food Print (ZFP), a voluntary program for restaurants that adds a 1% surcharge to orders to create a fund for carbon farm practice implementation. This funding will be one of the few sources of non-governmental, streamlined funding for carbon farming which is critical. CARCD and ZFP have entered into an MOU, with CARCD as their primary agricultural partner.
- CARCD had in-depth engagement with CDFA, primarily on the Healthy Soils, and Technical Assistance grant programs. These programs are the State's dedicated implementation and technical assistance funding for healthy soils practices. RCDs were awarded half of all CDFA's Technical Assistance Program grants.
- Rancher-to-Rancher: CARCD is overlapping our grazing and soils programs through a new partnership with the Rancher to Rancher group (housed under the Soil Carbon Coalition). Rancher to Rancher (R2R) has a unique & extremely effective way of interacting & educating producers by using facilitation practices, socratic teaching methods, & a focus on soil health principles rather than practices. CARCD is working with RCDs to develop local R2R peer-learning communities.

# Soil Health

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- SGMA in the SJV
  - CARCD has raised the capacity of several key RCDs in the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act and the San Joaquin Valley to better provide technical and educational support for the implementation of healthy soils for SGMA compliance. Specifically, Madera/Chowchilla RCD hosted and recorded a panel of technical experts for the region's RCDs to use for outreach to help. The panel included how to inform and educate producers around the reality of SGMA; educated about the critical role of conservation practices (such as healthy soils) in meeting the requirements of SGMA; and laid out the various options producers have to navigate SGMA. Finally, we have re-established a key RCD in the region, Excelsior/Kings RCD to specifically position them to focus support and resources on SGMA related projects and work with the relevant GSAs. In doing so we are building the profile of RCDs as the go-to hubs for smart conservation practices that help regional small farmers deal with the significant groundwater and soil health challenges facing the SJV.



# Water Efficiency & GHG Reduction

The Statewide Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program (SWEET) is administered by the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) for the purposes of 1) reducing greenhouse gas emissions from irrigation sources, and 2) increasing water use efficiency. SWEET provides incentive funding for landowners to upgrade irrigation equipment and monitoring systems.

CARCD received a grant from the Department of Water Resources to further SWEET outreach. 12 RCDs have received funding through this grant to assist agricultural landowners with irrigation efficiency. RCDs provide water efficiency technical assistance to producers, help determine if SWEET is an appropriate funding source for each producer, create a water/irrigation conservation plan, assist with the application process, and provide irrigation evaluations pre- and/or post implementation.



## Conservation in Cannabis

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In 2019-2020 CARCD worked with five RCDs and other partners to expand on the market-incentive certification program initiated last year that expands on Upper-Salinas Las Tablas RCD's self assessment tool for cannabis farms. An Advisory Panel made up of industry leaders has been convened to inform the strategic direction and attract interest and buy in from agencies and other stakeholders. A marketing firm has been brought on board to help guide efforts. State resource agencies are interested in promoting the project and CARCD is working to expand opportunities, private and public, for cannabis farmers looking to steward their land according to best management practices.



## Landowner Assistance (CA Farm Demonstration Network)

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Through a CDFA Specialty Crop Grant, CARCD was funded to strengthen the California Farm Demonstration Network. Working with multiple partners, CARCD is developing the following tools: building regional technical assistance hubs, designing a website for aggregated resources, creating a user-friendly network map, and identifying other opportunities that will bring TA providers and farmers together to share knowledge. Based on a 2017 MOU, project partners include UC Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of California at Davis, CDFA, California Farm Bureau Federation (CFBF) and USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).



## Pollinators/Monarchs

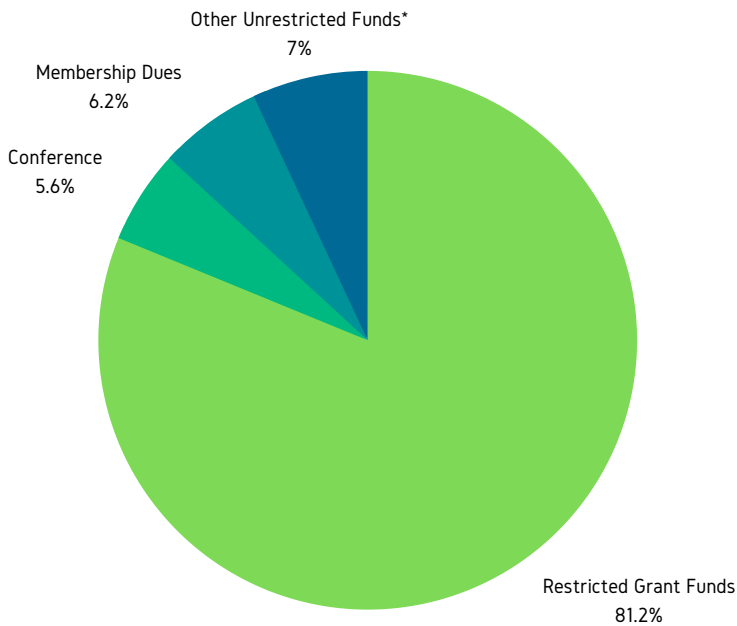
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- CARCD provided funding to 11 RCDs through our Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) Monarch block grant for the creation of 11 overwintering sites and 9 habitat restoration projects, development of management plans, technical assistance to farmers and ranchers, and outreach and education programs.
- Hired Dr. Hillary Sardiñas, PhD through our National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Technical Assistance grant to build RCD capacity around monarch conservation efforts. In her first 6 months she has provided support to 24 RCDs.
- Assisted 4 RCDs in the development of regional monarch work groups to bring local agencies together to identify priorities and opportunities for collaboration around monarch conservation, which also aligns with the Western Fish and Wildlife Association's monarch conservation plan around information exchanges between land managers to enhance habitat. These RCDs are sharing their successes with other interested RCDs to expand coordination between partners
- Developed and expanded partnerships with 15 conservation organizations and agencies, including Monarch Joint Venture, Project ApisM, The Almond Board, USDA NRCS, CDFA, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), USFWS, Partners for Fish and Wildlife, the California Native Plant Society (CNPS), and the Environmental Defense Fund.
- Hosted an 8-part webinar series in partnership with the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, which covered the current status of monarchs, how to select plant materials for restoration projects, how to design small scale projects as well as on-farm habitat, and how to protect habitat from pesticides.
- Created a monarch listserv to share information, connect RCDs to one another and key partners, and to stimulate discussion on monarch-related topics.
- Published two articles in the Friends of the Tilden Botanic Garden newsletter and CNPS' Flora Fall 2020 magazine edition. The first was on the importance of early-blooming California milkweed (*Asclepias californica*) to the monarch life cycle; the second provided tips for how to create a small-scale pollinator garden (that can also attract monarchs).



# FINANCIALS

## Revenue: Source of Funds



Restricted Grant Funds: \$1,859,386.23

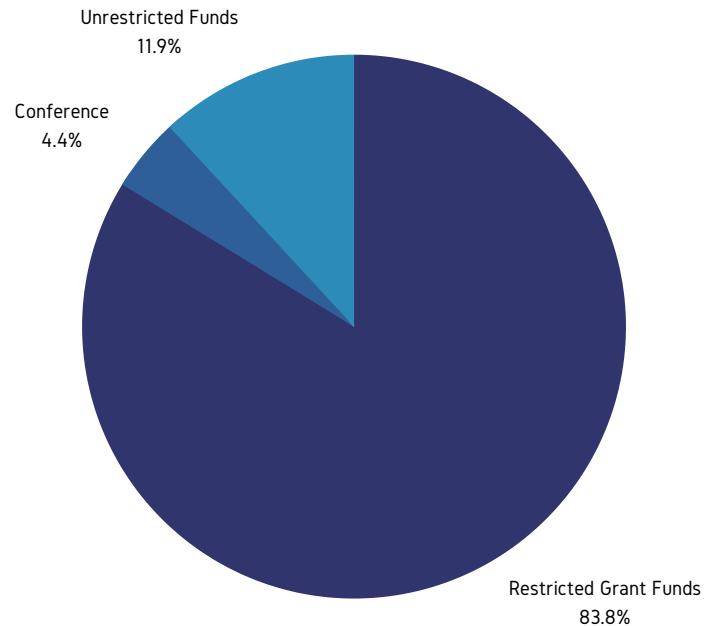
Conference: \$128,900.19

Membership Dues: \$142,392.93

Other Unrestricted Funds\*: \$159,277.55

\*Includes private funding & individual donors, earned revenue & interest

## Expenditures: Use of Funds



Restricted Grant Funds: \$1,859,386.23

Conference: \$97,049.75

Unrestricted Funds: \$263,623.54

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## Thank you to our grant funders & conference sponsors!

Natural Resources Conservation Service  
California Department of Conservation  
CAL FIRE  
California Department of Food and Agriculture  
California Department of Water Resources  
California Wildlife Conservation Board  
Sierra Nevada Conservancy  
United States Forest Service  
United States Army Corps of Engineers  
Sustainable Conservation  
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation  
S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation  
Resources Legacy Fund  
The Campbell Foundation  
Clarence E. Heller Charitable Foundation  
Tides Foundation  
The McConnell Foundation  
Central Valley Community Foundation  
Audubon  
Best Best & Krieger Law  
California Conservation Corps  
American Farmland Trust  
TomKat Ranch  
Kjeldsen, Sinnock & Neudeck, Inc.  
Tehama Environmental Solutions  
Environmental Defence Fund  
Cascade Stream Solutions  
Wildlands  
Farm Credit  
TSS Consultants  
The Freshwater Trust  
PACE Engineering  
Davids Engineering  
Visit Redding





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